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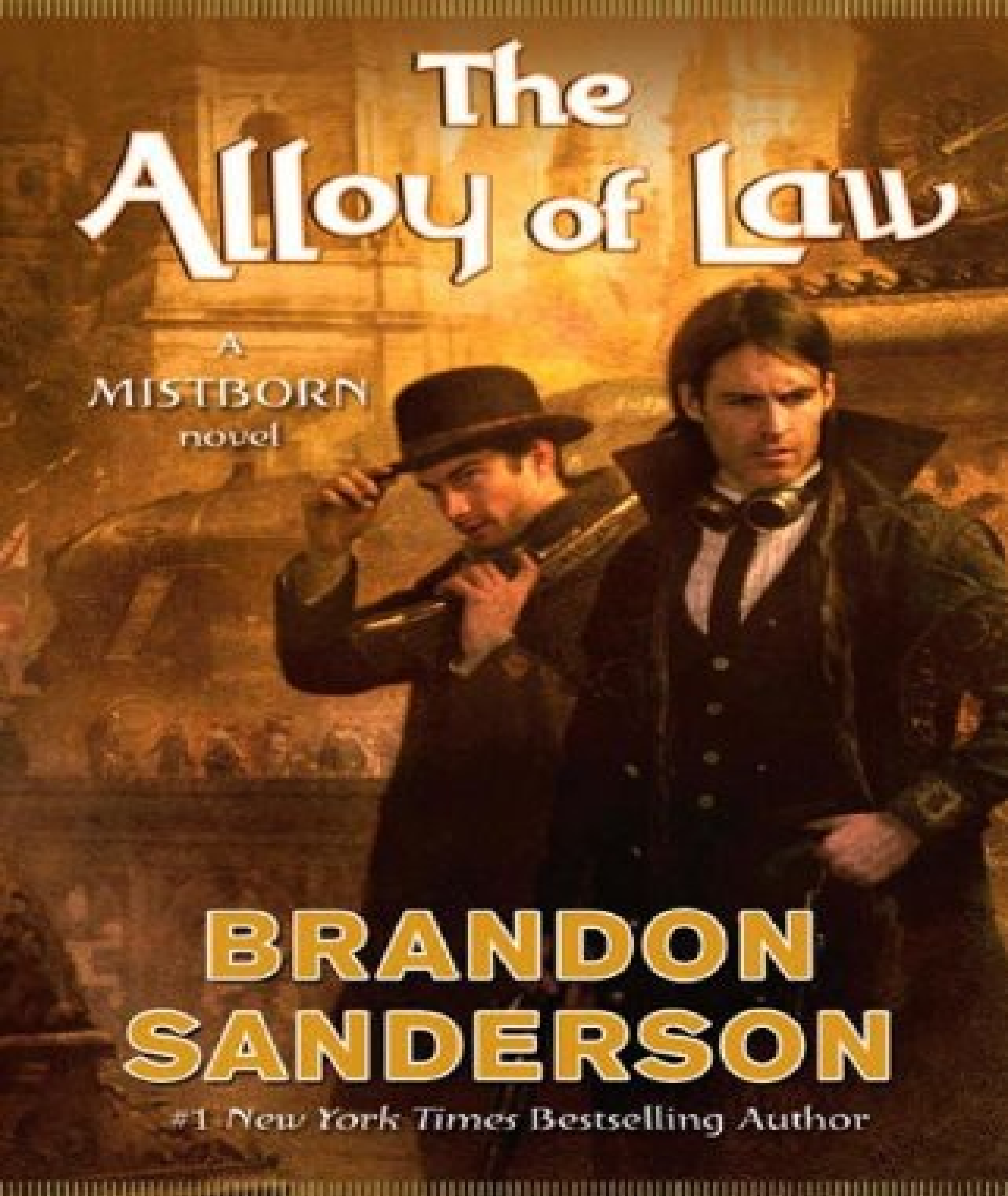

The Alloy of Law

A
MISTBORN
novel

BRANDON SANDERSON

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

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THE
ALLOY OF LAW

A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

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A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

FOR JOSHUA BILMES

Who is never afraid to tell me what is wrong with a book, then fight for that same book no matter who else gives up on it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first pitched the idea of later-era Mistborn novels to my editor back in 2006, I believe. It had long been my plan for Scadrial, the planet these books take place upon. I wanted to move away from the idea of fantasy worlds as static places, where millennia would pass and technology would never change. The plan then was for a second epic trilogy set in an urban era, and a third trilogy set in a futuristic era—with Allomancy, Feruchemy, and Hemalurgy being the common threads that tied them together.

This book isn't part of that second trilogy. It's a side deviation, something exciting that grew quite unexpectedly out of my planning for where the world would go. The point of telling you all of this, however, is to explain that it would be impossible to list all of the people who have helped me along the years. Instead, the best I can do is list some of the wonderful people who helped me with this specific book.

Alpha readers included, as always, my agent, Joshua Bilmes, and my editor, Moshe Feder. This book is dedicated to Joshua, actually. Professionally, he's believed in my work longer than anyone outside my writing group. He has been a wonderful resource and a good friend.

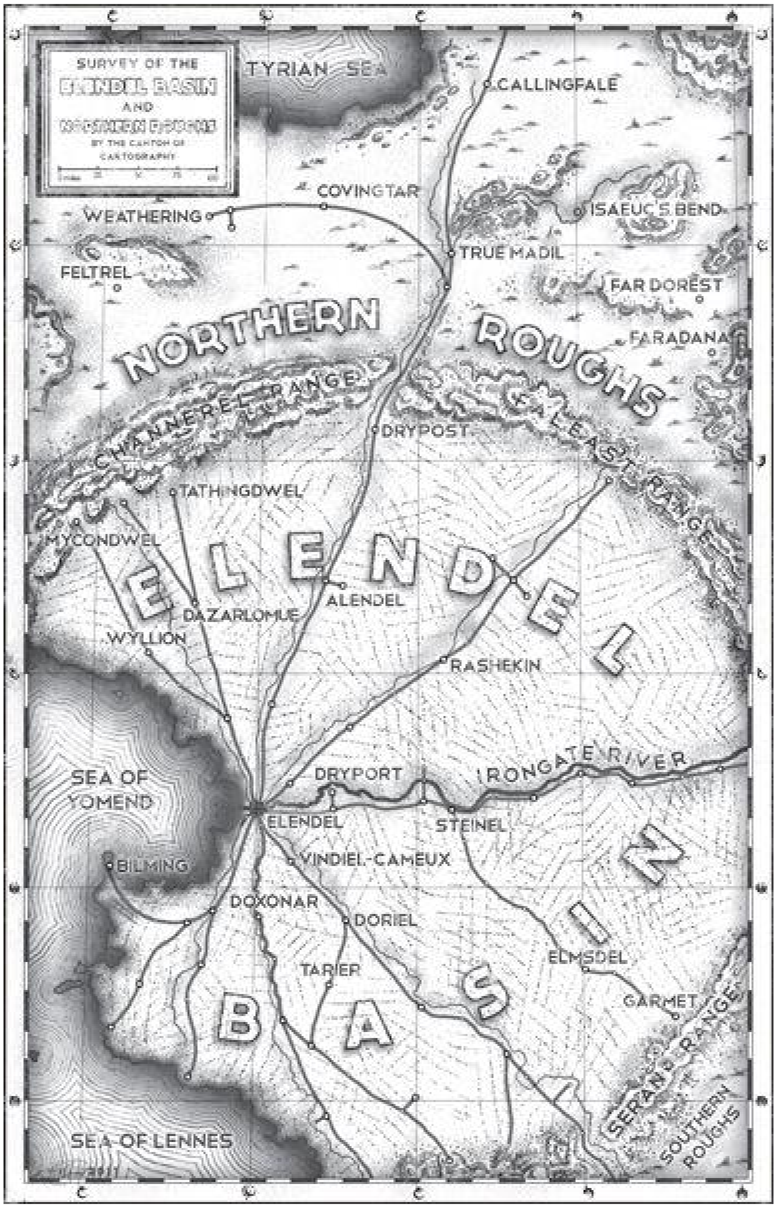
Other alphas were my writing group: Ethan Skarstedt, Dan Wells, Alan & Jeanette Layton, Kaylynn ZoBell, Karen Ahlstrom, Ben & Danielle Olsen, Jordan Sanderson (kind of), and Kathleen Dorsey. Finally, of course, there's the Inseparable Peter Ahlstrom, my assistant and friend, who does all kinds of important things for my writing and doesn't get nearly enough thanks for it.

At Tor Books, thanks go to Irene Gallo, Justin Golenbock, Terry McGarry, and many others I couldn't possibly name—everyone from Tom Doherty to the sales force. Thank you all for your excellent work. Once again, I feel the need to give a special thanks to Paul Stevens, who goes above and beyond what I could reasonably expect to give aid and explanations.

Beta readers included Jeff Creer and Dominique Nolan. A special thanks to Dom for being a resource in regards to weaponry and guns. If you ever need anything shot properly, he's the one to call.

Note the lovely cover by Chris McGrath, whom I asked for specifically because of his work on the Mistborn paperback covers. Both Ben McSweeney and Isaac Stewart returned to provide interior art for this book, as their work on *The Way of Kings* was just plain awesome. They've continued in their awesomeness. Ben also provided equally awesome illustrations for the recently released Mistborn RPG from Crafty Games. Check it out at crafty-games.com, especially if you're interested in Kelsier's origin story.

Last of all I'd like to once again thank Emily, my wonderful wife, for her support, commentary, and love.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MYCONDWEL
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DAZARLOMUE
WYLLION
RASHEKIN
SEA OF YOMEND
DRYPORT
IRONGATE RIVER
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STEINEL
VINDIEL-CAMEUX
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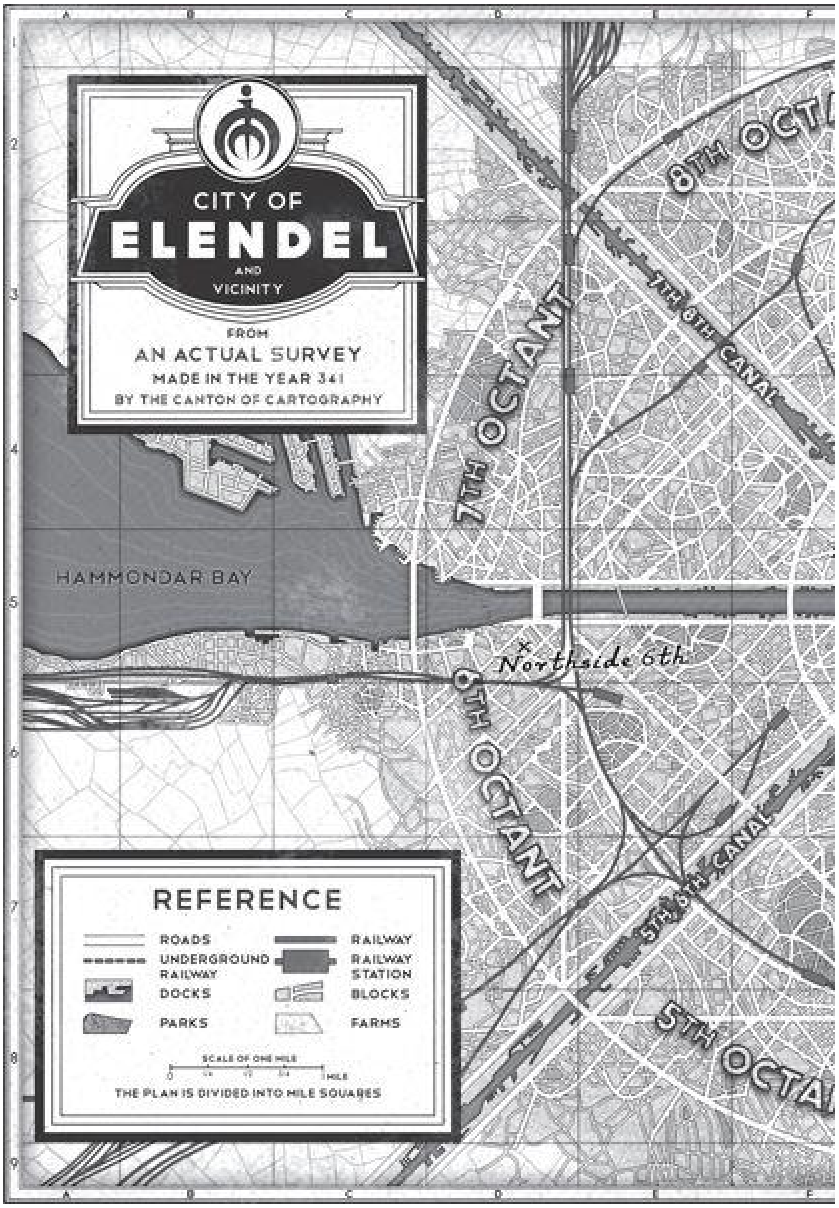
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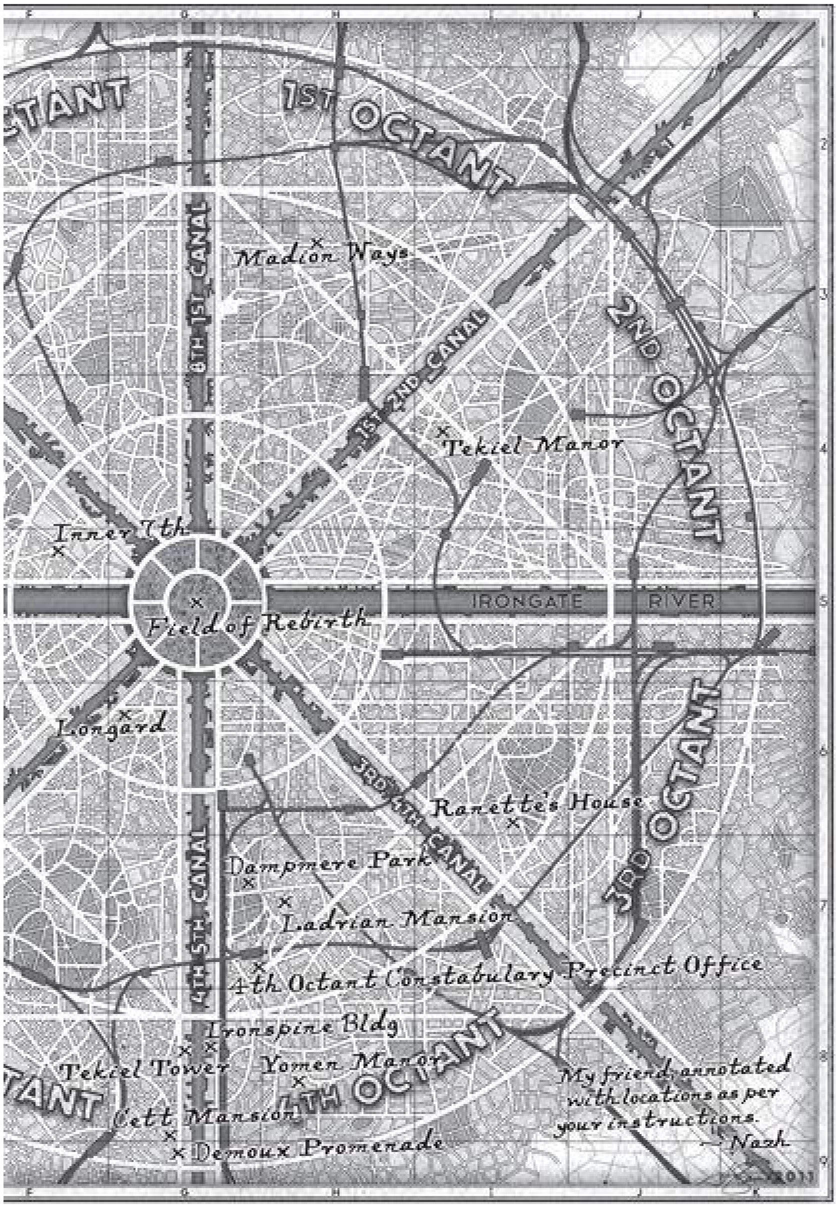
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IRONGATE RIVER
Madion Ways
Tekiel Manor
Inner 7th
Field of Rebirth
Longard
Ranette's House
Dampmere Park
Ladrian Mansion
4th Octant Constabulary Precinct Office
Ironspine Bldg
Tekiel Tower
Yomen Manor
Cett Mansion
Demoux Promenade

My friend, annotated
with locations as per
your instructions.
—Nash

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ARS Arcanum

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PROLOGUE

Wax crept along the ragged fence in a crouch, his boots scraping the dry ground. He held his Sterrion 36 up by his head, the long, silvery barrel dusted with red clay. The revolver was nothing fancy to look at, though the six-shot cylinder was machined with such care in the steel-alloy frame that there was no play in its movement. There was no gleam to the metal or exotic material on the grip. But it fit his hand like it was meant to be there.

The waist-high fence was flimsy, the wood grayed with time, held together with fraying lengths of rope. It smelled of age. Even the worms had given up on this wood long ago.

Wax peeked up over the knotted boards, scanning the empty town. Blue lines hovered in his vision, extending from his chest to point at nearby sources of metal, a result of his Allomancy. Burning steel did that; it let him see the location of sources of metal, then Push against them if he wanted. His weight against the weight of the item. If it was heavier, he was pushed back. If he was heavier, it was pushed forward.

In this case, however, he didn't Push. He just watched the lines to see if any of the metal was moving. None of it was. Nails holding together buildings, spent shell casings lying scattered in the dust, or horseshoes piled at the silent smithy—all were as motionless as the old hand pump planted in the ground to his right.

Wary, he too remained still. Steel continued to burn comfortably in his stomach, and so—as a precaution—he gently Pushed outward from himself in all directions. It was a trick he'd mastered a few years back; he didn't Push on any specific metal objects, but created a kind of defensive bubble around himself. Any metal that came streaking in his direction would be thrown slightly off course.

It was far from foolproof; he could still get hit. But shots would go wild, not striking where they were aimed. It had saved his life on a couple of occasions. He wasn't even certain how he did it; Allomancy was often an instinctive thing for him. Somehow he even managed to exempt the metal he carried, and didn't Push his own gun from his hands.

That done, he continued along the fence—still watching the metal lines to make sure nobody was sneaking up on him. Feltrel had once been a prosperous town. That had been twenty years back. Then a clan of koloss had taken up residence nearby. Things hadn't gone well.

Today, the dead town seemed completely empty, though he knew it wasn't so. Wax had come here hunting a psychopath. And he wasn't the only one.

He grabbed the top of the fence and hopped over, feet grinding red clay. Crouching low, he ran in a squat over to the side of the old blacksmith's forge. His clothing was terribly dusty, but well tailored: a fine suit, a silver cravat at the neck, twinkling cuff links on the sleeves of his fine white shirt. He had cultivated a look that appeared out of place, as if he were planning to attend a fine ball back in Elendel rather than scrambling through a dead town in the Roughs hunting a murderer. Completing the ensemble, he wore a bowler hat on his head to keep off the sun.

A sound; someone stepped on a board across the street, making it creak. It was so faint, he almost missed it. Wax reacted immediately, flaring the steel that burned inside his stomach. He Pushed on a group of nails in the wall beside him just as the crack of a gunshot split the air.

His sudden Push caused the wall to rattle, the old rusty nails straining in their places. His Push shoved him to the side, and he rolled across the ground. A blue line appeared for an eyeblink—the bullet, which hit the ground where he had been a moment before. As he came up from his roll, a second shot followed. This one came close, but bent just a hair out of the way as it neared him.

Deflected by his steel bubble, the bullet zipped past his ear. Another inch to the right, and he'd have gotten it in the forehead—steel bubble or no. Breathing calmly, he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the balcony of the old hotel across the street, where the shot had come from. The balcony was fronted by the hotel's sign, capable of hiding a gunman.

Wax fired, then Pushed on the bullet, slamming it forward with extra thrust to make it faster and more penetrating. He wasn't using typical lead or copper-jacketed lead bullets; he needed something stronger.

The large-caliber steel-jacketed bullet hit the balcony, and his extra power caused it to puncture the wood and hit the man behind. The blue line leading to the man’s gun quivered as he fell. Wax stood up slowly, brushing the dust from his clothing. At that moment another shot cracked in the air.

He cursed, reflexively Pushing against the nails again, though his instincts told him he’d be too late. By the time he heard a shot, it was too late for Pushing to help.

This time he was thrown to the ground. That force had to go somewhere, and if the nails couldn’t move, he had to. He grunted as he hit and raised his revolver, dust sticking to the sweat on his hand. He searched frantically for the one who’d fired at him. They’d missed. Perhaps the steel bubble had—

A body rolled off the top of the blacksmith’s shop and thumped down to the ground with a puff of red dust. Wax blinked, then raised his gun to chest level and moved over behind the fence again, crouching down for cover. He kept an eye on the blue Allomantic lines. They could warn him if someone got close, but only if the person was carrying or wearing metal.

The body that had fallen beside the building didn’t have a single line pointing to it. However, another set of quivering lines pointed to something moving along the back of the forge. Wax leveled his gun, taking aim as a figure ducked around the side of the building and ran toward him.

The woman wore a white duster, reddened at the bottom. She kept her dark hair pulled back in a tail, and wore trousers and a wide belt, with thick boots on her feet. She had a squarish face. A strong face, with lips that often rose slightly at the right side in a half smile.

Wax heaved a sigh of relief and lowered his gun. “Lessie.”

“You knock yourself to the ground again?” she asked as she reached the cover of the fence beside him. “You’ve got more dust on your face than Miles has scowls. Maybe it’s time for you to retire, old man.”

“Lessie, I’m *three months* older than you are.”

“Those are a long three months.” She peeked up over the fence. “Seen anyone else?”

“I dropped a man up on the balcony,” Wax said. “I couldn’t see if it was Bloody Tan or not.”

“It wasn’t,” she said. “He wouldn’t have tried to shoot you from so far away.”

Wax nodded. Tan liked things personal. Up close. The psychopath lamented when he had to use a gun, and he rarely shot someone without being able to see the fear in their eyes.

Lessie scanned the quiet town, then glanced at him, ready to move. Her eyes flickered downward for a moment. Toward his shirt pocket.

Wax followed her gaze. A letter was peeking out of his pocket, delivered earlier that day. It was from the grand city of Elendel, and was addressed to Lord Waxillium Ladrian. A name Wax hadn't used in years. A name that felt wrong to him now.

He tucked the letter farther into his pocket. Lessie thought it implied more than it did. The city didn't hold anything for him now, and House Ladrian would get along without him. He really should have burned that letter.

Wax nodded toward the fallen man beside the wall to distract her from the letter. "Your work?"

"He had a bow," she said. "Stone arrowheads. Almost had you from above."

"Thanks."

She shrugged, eyes glittering in satisfaction. Those eyes now had lines at the sides of them, weathered by the Roughs' harsh sunlight. There had been a time when she and Wax had kept a tally of who had saved the other most often. They'd both lost track years ago.

"Cover me," Wax said softly.

"With what?" she asked. "Paint? Kisses? You're already covered with dust."

Wax raised an eyebrow at her.

"Sorry," she said, grimacing. "I've been playing cards too much with Wayne lately."

He snorted and ran in a crouch to the fallen corpse and rolled it over. The man had been a cruel-faced fellow with several days of stubble on his cheeks; the bullet wound bled out his right side. *I think I recognize him,* Wax thought to himself as he went through the man's pockets and came out with a drop of red glass, colored like blood.

He hurried back to the fence.

"Well?" Lessie asked.

"Donal's crew," Wax said, holding up the drop of glass.

"Bastards," Lessie said. "They couldn't just leave us to it, could they?"

“You *did* shoot his son, Lessie.”

“And you shot his brother.”

“Mine was self-defense.”

“Mine was too,” she said. “That kid was *annoying*. Besides, he survived.”

“Missing a toe.”

“You don’t need ten,” she said. “I have a cousin with four. She does just fine.” She raised her revolver, scanning the empty town. “Of course, she does look kind of ridiculous. Cover me.”

“With what?”

She just grinned and ducked out from behind the cover, scrambling across the ground toward the smithy.

Harmony, Wax thought with a smile, *I love that woman.*

He watched for more gunmen, but Lessie reached the building without any further shots being fired. Wax nodded to her, then dashed across the street toward the hotel. He ducked inside, checking the corners for foes. The taproom was empty, so he took cover beside the doorway, waving toward Lessie. She ran down to the next building on her side of the street and checked it out.

Donal’s crew. Yes, Wax had shot his brother—the man had been robbing a railway car at the time. From what he understood, though, Donal hadn’t ever cared for his brother. No, the only thing that riled Donal was losing money, which was probably why he was here. He’d put a price on Bloody Tan’s head for stealing a shipment of his bendalloy. Donal probably hadn’t expected Wax to come hunting Tan the same day he did, but his men had standing orders to shoot Wax or Lessie if seen.

Wax was half tempted to leave the dead town and let Donal and Tan have at it. The thought of it made his eye twitch, though. He’d promised to bring Tan in. That was that.

Lessie waved from the inside of her building, then pointed toward the back. She was going to go out in that direction and creep along behind the next set of buildings. Wax nodded, then made a curt gesture. He’d try to hook up with Wayne and Barl, who had gone to check the other side of the town.

Lessie vanished, and Wax picked his way through the old hotel toward a side door. He passed old, dirty nests made by both rats and men. The town picked up miscreants the way a dog picked up fleas. He even passed a place where it looked like some wayfarer had made a small firepit on a sheet of metal with a ring of rocks. It was a wonder the fool hadn't burned the entire building to the ground.

Wax eased open the side door and stepped into an alleyway between the hotel and the store beside it. The gunshots earlier would have been heard, and someone might come looking. Best to stay out of sight.

Wax edged around the back of the store, stepping quietly across the red clay ground. The hillside here was overgrown with weeds except for the entrance to an old cold cellar. Wax wound around it, then paused, eyeing the wood-framed pit.

Maybe …

He knelt beside the opening, peering down. There had been a ladder here once, but it had rotted away—the remnants were visible below in a pile of old splinters. The air smelled musty and wet … with a hint of smoke. Someone had been burning a torch down there.

Wax dropped a bullet into the hole, then leaped in, gun out. As he fell, he filled his iron metalmind, decreasing his weight. He was Twinborn—a Feruchemist as well as an Allomancer. His Allomantic power was Steelpushing, and his Feruchemical power, called Skimming, was the ability to grow heavier or lighter. It was a powerful combination of talents.

He Pushed against the round below him, slowing his fall so that he landed softly. He returned his weight to normal—or, well, normal for him. He often went about at three-quarters of his unadjusted weight, making himself lighter on his feet, quicker to react.

He crept through the darkness. It had been a long, difficult road, finding where Bloody Tan was hiding. In the end, the fact that Feltrel had suddenly emptied of other bandits, wanderers, and unfortunates had been a major clue. Wax stepped softly, working his way deeper into the cellar. The scent of smoke was stronger here, and though the light was fading, he made out a firepit beside the earthen wall. That and a ladder that could be moved into place at the entrance.

That gave him pause. It indicated that whoever was making their hideout in the cellar—it could be Tan, or it could be someone else entirely—was still down here. Unless there was another way out. Wax crept forward a little farther, squinting in the dark.

There was light ahead.

Wax cocked his gun softly, then drew a little vial out of his mistcoat and pulled the cork with his teeth. He downed the whiskey and steel in one shot, restoring his reserves. He flared his steel. Yes … there was metal ahead of him, down the tunnel. How long was this cellar? He had assumed it would be small, but the reinforcing wood timbers indicated something deeper, longer. More like a mine adit.

He crept forward, focused on those metal lines. Someone would have to aim a gun if they saw him, and the metal would quiver, giving him a chance to Push the weapon out of their hands. Nothing moved. He slid forward, smelling musty damp soil, fungus, potatoes left to bud. He approached a trembling light, but could hear nothing. The metal lines did not move.

Finally, he got close enough to make out a lamp hanging by a hook on a wooden beam near the wall. Something else hung at the center of the tunnel. A body? Hanged? Wax cursed softly and hurried forward, wary of a trap. It *was* a corpse, but it left him baffled. At first glance, it seemed years old. The eyes were gone from the skull, the skin pulled back against the bone. It didn’t stink, and wasn’t bloated.

He thought he recognized it. Geormin, the coachman who brought mail into Weathering from the more distant villages around the area. That was his uniform, at least, and it seemed like his hair. He’d been one of Tan’s first victims, the disappearance that sent Wax hunting. That had only been two months back.

He’s been mummified, Wax thought. *Prepared and dried like leather.* He felt revolted—he’d gone drinking with Geormin on occasion, and though the man cheated at cards, he’d been an amiable enough fellow.

The hanging wasn’t an ordinary one, either. Wires had been used to prop up Geormin’s arms so they were out to the sides, his head cocked, his mouth pried open. Wax turned away from the gruesome sight, his eye twitching.

Careful, he told himself. *Don’t let him anger you. Keep focused.* He would be back to cut Geormin down. Right now, he couldn’t afford to make the noise. At least he knew he was on the right track. This was certainly Bloody Tan’s lair.

There was another patch of light in the distance. How long *was* this tunnel? He approached the pool of light, and here found another corpse, this one hung on the wall sideways. Annarel, a visiting geologist who had vanished soon after Geormin. Poor woman. She’d been dried in the same manner, body spiked to the wall in a very specific pose, as if she were on her knees inspecting a pile of rocks.

Another pool of light drew him onward. Clearly this wasn't a cellar—it was probably some kind of smuggling tunnel left over from the days when Feltrel had been a booming town. Tan hadn't built this, not with those aged wooden supports.

Wax passed another six corpses, each lit by its own glowing lantern, each arranged in some kind of pose. One sat in a chair, another strung up as if flying, a few stuck to the wall. The later ones were more fresh, the last one recently killed. Wax didn't recognize the slender man, who hung with hand to his head in a salute.

Rust and Ruin, Wax thought. *This isn't Bloody Tan's lair … it's his gallery.*

Sickened, Wax made his way to the next pool of light. This one was different. Brighter. As he approached, he realized that he was seeing sunlight streaming down from a square cut in the ceiling. The tunnel led up to it, probably to a former trapdoor that had rotted or broken away. The ground sloped in a gradual slant up to the hole.

Wax crawled up the slope, then cautiously poked his head out. He'd come up in a building, though the roof was gone. The brick walls were mostly intact, and there were four altars in the front, just to Wax's left. An old chapel to the Survivor. It seemed empty.

Wax crawled out of the hole, his Sterrion at the side of his head, coat marred by dirt from below. The clean, dry air smelled good to him.

"Each life is a performance," a voice said, echoing in the ruined church.

Wax immediately ducked to the side, rolling up to an altar.

"But we are not the performers," the voice continued. "We are the puppets."

"Tan," Wax said. "Come out."

"I have seen God, lawkeeper," Tan whispered. Where was he? "I have seen Death himself, with the nails in his eyes. I have seen the Survivor, who is life."

Wax scanned the small chapel. It was cluttered with broken benches and fallen statues. He rounded the side of the altar, judging the sound to come from the back of the room.

"Other men wonder," Tan's voice said, "but I know. I know I'm a puppet. We all are. Did you like my show? I worked so hard to build it."

Wax continued along the building’s right wall, his boots leaving a trail in the dust. He breathed shallowly, a line of sweat creeping down his right temple. His eye was twitching. He saw corpses on the walls in his mind’s eye.

“Many men never get a chance to create true art,” Tan said. “And the best performances are those which can never be reproduced. Months, years, spent preparing. Everything placed right. But at the end of the day, the rotting will begin. I couldn’t truly mummify them; I hadn’t the time or resources. I could only preserve them long enough to prepare for this one show. Tomorrow, it will be ruined. You were the only one to see it. Only you. I figure … we’re all just puppets … you see…”

The voice *was* coming from the back of the room, near some rubble that was blocking Wax’s view.

“Someone else moves us,” Tan said.

Wax ducked around the side of the rubble, raising his Sterrion.

Tan stood there, holding Lessie in front of him, her mouth gagged, her eyes wide. Wax froze in place, gun raised. Lessie was bleeding from her leg and her arm. She’d been shot, and her face was growing pale. She’d lost blood. That was how Tan had been able to overpower her.

Wax grew still. He didn’t feel anxiety. He couldn’t afford to; it might make him shake, and shaking might make him miss. He could see Tan’s face behind Lessie; the man held a garrote around her neck.

Tan was a slender, fine-fingered man. He’d been a mortician. Black hair, thinning, worn greased back. A nice suit that now shone with blood.

“Someone else moves us, lawman,” Tan said softly.

Lessie met Wax’s eyes. They both knew what to do in this situation. Last time, he’d been the one captured. People always tried to use them against each other. In Lessie’s opinion, that wasn’t a disadvantage. She’d have explained that if Tan *hadn’t* known the two of them were a couple, he’d have killed her right off. Instead, he’d kidnapped her. That gave them a chance to get out.

Wax sighted down the barrel of his Sterrion. He drew in the trigger until he balanced the weight of the sear right on the edge of firing, and Lessie blinked. One. Two. Three.

Wax fired.

In the same instant, Tan yanked Lessie to the right.

The shot broke the air, echoing against clay bricks. Lessie’s head jerked back as Wax’s bullet took her just above the right eye. Blood sprayed against the clay wall beside her. She crumpled.

Wax stood, frozen, horrified. *No … that isn’t the way … it can’t …*

“The best performances,” Tan said, smiling and looking down at Lessie’s figure, “are those that can only be performed once.”

Wax shot him in the head.

1

Five months later, Wax walked through the decorated rooms of a large, lively party, passing men in dark suits with tailcoats and women in colorful dresses with narrow waists and lots of folds through long pleated skirts. They called him “Lord Waxillium” or “Lord Ladrian” when they spoke to him.

He nodded to each, but avoided being drawn into conversation. He deliberately made his way to one of the back rooms of the party, where dazzling electric lights—the talk of the city—produced a steady, too-even light to ward off the evening’s gloom. Outside the windows, he could see mist tickling the glass.

Defying decorum, Wax pushed his way through the room’s enormous glass double doors and stepped out onto the mansion’s grand balcony. There, finally, he felt like he could breathe again.

He closed his eyes, taking the air in and out, feeling the faint wetness of the mists on the skin of his face. *Buildings are so … suffocating here in the city,* he thought. *Have I simply forgotten about that, or did I not notice it when I was younger?*

He opened his eyes, and rested his hands on the balcony railing to look out over Elendel. It was the grandest city in all the world, a metropolis designed by Harmony himself. The place of Wax’s youth. A place that hadn’t been his home for twenty years.

Though it had been five months since Lessie’s death, he could still hear the gunshot, see the blood sprayed on the bricks. He had left the Roughs, moved back to the city, answering the desperate summons to do his duty to his house at his uncle’s passing.

Five months and a world away, and he could still hear that gunshot. Crisp, clean, like the sky cracking.

Behind him, he could hear musical laughter coming from the warmth of the room. Cett Mansion was a grand place, full of expensive woods, soft carpets, and sparkling chandeliers. No one joined him on the balcony.

From this vantage, he had a perfect view of the lights down Demoux Promenade. A double row of bright electric lamps with a steady, blazing whiteness. They glowed like bubbles along the wide boulevard, which was flanked by the even wider canal, the still and quiet waters reflecting the light. An evening railway engine called a greeting as it chugged through the distant center of the city, hemming the mists with darker smoke.

Down Demoux Promenade, Wax had a good view of both the Ironspine Building and Tekiel Tower, one on either side of the canal. Both were unfinished, but their steelwork lattices already rose high into the sky. Mind-numbingly high.

The architects continued to release updated reports of how high they intended to go, each one trying to outdo the other. Rumors he'd heard at this very party, credible ones, claimed that both would eventually top out at over fifty stories. Nobody knew which would end up proving the taller, though friendly wagers were common.

Wax breathed in the mists. Out in the Roughs, Cett Mansion—which was three stories high—would have been as tall as a building got. Here, it felt dwarfed. The world had gone and changed on him during his years out of the city. It had grown up, inventing lights that needed no fire to glow and buildings that threatened to rise higher than the mists themselves. Looking down that wide street at the edge of the Fifth Octant, Wax suddenly felt very, very old.

"Lord Waxillium?" a voice asked from behind.

He turned to find an older woman, Lady Aving Cett, peeking out the door at him. Her gray hair was up in a bun and she wore rubies at her neck. "By Harmony, my good man. You'll take a chill out here! Come, there are some people you will wish to meet."

"I'll be along presently, my lady," Wax said. "I'm just getting a little air."

Lady Cett frowned, but retreated. She didn't know what to make of him; none of them did. Some saw him as a mysterious scion of the Ladrian family, associated with strange stories of the realms beyond the mountains. The rest assumed him to be an uncultured, rural buffoon. He figured he was probably both.

He'd been on show all night. He was *supposed* to be looking for a wife, and pretty much everyone knew it. House Ladrian was insolvent following his uncle's imprudent management, and the easiest path to solvency was marriage. Unfortunately, his uncle had *also* managed to offend three-quarters of the city's upper crust.

Wax leaned forward on the balcony, the Sterrion revolvers under his arms jabbing his sides. With their long barrels, they weren't meant to be carried in underarm holsters. They had been awkward all night.

He should be getting back to the party to chat and try to repair House Ladrian's reputation. But the thought of that crowded room, so hot, so close, sweltering, making it difficult to breathe.…

Giving himself no time to reconsider, he swung off over the side of the balcony and began falling three stories toward the ground. He burned steel, then dropped a spent bullet casing slightly behind himself and Pushed against it; his weight sent it speeding down to the earth faster than he fell. As always, thanks to his Feruchemy, he was lighter than he should have been. He hardly knew anymore what it felt like to go around at his full weight.

When the casing hit the ground, he Pushed against it and sent himself horizontally in a leap over the garden wall. With one hand on its stone top, he vaulted out of the garden, then reduced his weight to a fraction of normal as he fell down the other side. He landed softly.

Ah, good, he thought, crouching down and peering through the mists. *The coachmen's yard.* The vehicles everyone had used to get there were arranged here in neat rows, the coachmen themselves chatting in a few cozy rooms that spilled orange light into the mists. No electric lights here; just good, warmth-giving hearths.

He walked among the carriages until he found his own, then opened the trunk strapped to the back.

Off came his gentleman's fine dinner coat. Instead he threw on his mistcoat, a long, enveloping garment like a duster with a thick collar and cuffed sleeves. He slipped a shotgun into its pocket on the inside, then buckled on his gun belt and moved the Sterrions into the holsters at his hips.

Ah, he thought. *Much better.* He really needed to stop carrying the Sterrions and get some more practical weapons for concealment. Unfortunately, he'd never found anything as good as Ranette's work. Hadn't she moved to the city, though? Perhaps he could look her up and talk her into making him something. Assuming she didn't shoot him on sight.

A few moments later, he was running through the city, the mistcoat light upon his back. He left it open at the front, revealing his black shirt and gentleman's trousers. The ankle-length mistcoat had been divided into strips from just above the waist, the tassels streaming behind him with a faint rustle.

He dropped a bullet casing and launched himself high into the air, landing atop the building across the street from the mansion. He glanced back at it, the windows ablaze in the evening dark. What kind of rumors was he going to start, vanishing from the balcony like that?

Well, they already knew he was Twinborn—that was a matter of public record. His disappearance wasn't going to do much to help patch his family's reputation. For the moment, he didn't care. He'd spent almost every evening since his return to the city at one social function or another, and they hadn't had a misty night in weeks.

He needed the mists. This was who he was.

Wax dashed across the rooftop and leaped off, moving toward Demoux Promenade. Just before hitting the ground, he flipped a spent casing down and Pushed on it, slowing his descent. He landed in a patch of decorative shrubs that caught his coat tassels and made a rustling noise.

Damn. Nobody planted decorative shrubs out in the Roughs. He pulled himself free, wincing at the noise. A few weeks in the city, and he was already getting rusty?

He shook his head and Pushed himself into the air again, moving out over the wide boulevard and parallel canal. He angled his flight so he crested that and landed on one of the new electric lamps. There was one nice thing about a modern city like this; it had a *lot* of metal.

He smiled, then flared his steel and Pushed off the top of the streetlamp, sending himself in a wide arc through the air. Mist streamed past him, swirling as the wind rushed against his face. It was thrilling. A man never truly felt free until he'd thrown off gravity's chains and sought the sky.

As he crested his arc, he Pushed against another streetlight, throwing himself farther forward. The long row of metal poles was like his own personal railway line. He bounded onward, his antics drawing attention from those in passing carriages, both horse-drawn and horseless.

He smiled. Coinshots like himself were relatively rare, but Elendel was a major city with an enormous population. He wouldn't be the first man these people had seen bounding by metal through the city. Coinshots often acted as high-speed couriers in Elendel.

The city's size still astonished him. Millions lived here, maybe as many as *five* million. Nobody had a sure count across all of its wards—they were called octants, and as one might expect, there were eight of them.

Millions; he couldn't picture that, though he'd grown up here. Before he'd left Weathering, he'd been starting to think it was getting too big, but there couldn't have been ten thousand people in the town.

He landed atop a lamp directly in front of the massive Ironspine Building. He craned his neck, looking up through the mists at the towering structure. The unfinished top was lost in the darkness. Could he climb something so high? He couldn't Pull on metals, only Push—he wasn't some mythological Mistborn from the old stories, like the Survivor or the Ascendant Warrior. One Allomantic power, one Feruchemical power, that was all a man could have. In fact, having just one was a rare privilege—being Twinborn like Wax was truly exceptional.

Wayne claimed to have memorized the names of all of the different possible combinations of Twinborn. Of course, Wayne also claimed to have once stolen a horse that belched in perfect musical notes, so one learned to take what he said with a pinch of copper. Wax honestly didn't pay attention to all of the definitions and names for Twinborn; he was called a Crasher, the mix of a Coinshot and a Skimmer. He rarely bothered to think of himself that way.

He began to fill his metalminds—the iron bracers he wore on his upper arms—draining himself of more weight, making himself even lighter. That weight would be stored away for future use. Then, ignoring the more cautious part of his mind, he flared his steel and *Pushed*.

He shot upward. The wind became a roar, and the lamp was a good anchor—lots of metal, firmly attached to the ground—capable of pushing him quite high. He'd angled slightly, and the building's stories became a blur in front of him. He landed about twenty stories up, just as his Push on the lamp was reaching its limit.

This portion of the building had been finished already, the exterior made of a molded material that imitated worked stone. Ceramics, he'd heard. It was a common practice for tall buildings, where the lower levels would be actual stone, but the higher reaches would use something lighter.

He grabbed hold of an outcropping. He wasn’t so light that the wind could push him away—not with his metalminds on his forearms and the weapons he wore. His lighter body did make it easier to hold himself in place.

Mist swirled beneath him. It seemed almost playful. He looked upward, deciding his next step. His steel revealed lines of blue to nearby sources of metal, many of which were the structure’s frame. Pushing on any of them would send him away from the building.

There, he thought, noting a decent-sized ledge about five feet up. He climbed up the side of the building, gloved fingers sure on the complexly ornamented surface. A Coinshot quickly learned not to fear heights. He hoisted himself up onto the ledge, then dropped a bullet casing, stopping it with his booted foot.

He looked upward, judging his trajectory. He drew a vial from his belt, then uncorked it and downed the liquid and steel shavings inside it. He hissed through his teeth as the whiskey burned his throat. Good stuff, from Stagin’s still. *Damn, I’m going to miss that when my stock runs out,* he thought, tucking the vial away.

Most Allomancers didn’t use whiskey in their metal vials. Most Allomancers were missing out on a perfect opportunity. He smiled as his internal steel reserves were restored; then he flared the metal and launched himself.

He flew up into the night sky. Unfortunately, the Ironspine was built in set-back tiers, the upper stories growing progressively narrower as you went higher. That meant that even though he Pushed himself directly up, he was soon soaring in open darkness, mists around him, the building’s side a good ten feet away.

Wax reached into his coat and removed his short-barreled shotgun from the long, sleevelike pocket inside. He turned—pointing it outward—braced it against his side, and fired.

He was light enough that the kick flung him toward the building. The boom of the blast echoed below, but he had spray shot in the shells, too small and light to hurt anyone when it fell dispersed from such a height.

He slammed into the wall of the tower five stories above where he’d been, and grabbed hold of a spikelike protrusion. The decoration up here really was marvelous. Who did they think would be looking at it? He shook his head. Architects were curious types. Not practical at all, like a good gunsmith. Wax climbed to another shelf and jumped upward again.

The next jump was enough to get him to the open steelwork lattice of the unfinished upper floors. He strolled across a girder, then shimmied up a vertical member—his reduced weight making it easy—and climbed atop the very tallest of the beams jutting from the top of the building.

The height was dizzying. Even with the mists obscuring the landscape, he could see the double row of lights illuminating the street below. Other lights glowed more softly across the town, like the floating candles of a seafarer's ocean burial. Only the absence of lights allowed him to pick out the various parks and the bay far to the west.

Once, this city had felt like home. That was before he'd spent twenty years living out in the dust, where the law was sometimes a distant memory and people considered carriages a frivolity. What would Lessie have thought of one of these horseless contraptions, with the thin wheels meant for driving on a city's fine paved streets? Vehicles that ran on oil and grease, not hay and horseshoes?

He turned about on his perch. It was difficult to judge locations in the dark and the mists, but he did have the advantage of a youth spent in this section of the city. Things had changed, but not *that* much. He judged the direction, checked his steel reserves, then launched himself out into the darkness.

He shot outward in a grand arc above the city, flying for a good half a minute on the Push off those enormous girders. The skyscraper became a shadowed silhouette behind him, then vanished. Eventually, his impetus ran out, and he dropped back through the mists. He let himself fall, quiet. When the lights grew close—and he could see that nobody was below him—he pointed his shotgun at the ground and pulled the trigger.

The jolt punched him upward for a moment, slowing his descent. He Pushed off the birdshot in the ground to slow him further; he landed easily in a soft crouch. He noticed with dissatisfaction that he'd all but ruined some good paving stones with the shot.

Harmony! he thought. This place really was going to take some getting used to. *I'm like a horse blundering through a narrow marketplace,* he thought, hooking his shotgun back under his coat. *I need to learn more finesse.* Out in the Roughs, he'd been considered a refined gentleman. Here, if he didn't watch himself, he'd soon prove himself to be the uncultured brute that most of the nobility already assumed that he was. It—

Gunfire.

Wax responded immediately. He Pushed himself sideways off an iron gate, then ducked in a roll. He came up and reached for a Sterrion with his right hand, his left steadying the shotgun in its sleeve in his coat.

He peered into the night. Had his thoughtless shotgun blasts drawn the attention of the local constables? The guns fired again, and he frowned. *No. Those are too distant. Something's happening.*

This actually gave him a thrill. He leaped into the air and down the street, Pushing off that same gate to get height. He landed atop a building; this area was filled with three- and four-story apartment structures that had narrow alleyways between. How could people live without any space around them? He'd have gone mad.

He crossed a few buildings—it was handy that the rooftops were flat—and then stopped to listen. His heart beat excitedly, and he realized he'd been hoping for something like this. It was why he'd been driven to leave the party, to seek out the skyscraper and climb it, to run through the mists. Back in Weathering, as the town grew larger, he'd often patrolled at night, watching for trouble.

He fingered his Sterrion as another shot was fired, closer this time. He judged his distance, then dropped a bullet casing and Pushed himself into the air. He'd restored his weight to three-quarters and left it there. You needed some weight on you to fight effectively.

The mists swirled and spun, teasing him. One could never tell which nights would bring out the mists; they didn't conform to normal weather patterns. A night could be humid and chill, and yet not a wisp of mists would appear. Another night could begin dry as brittle leaves, but the mists would consume it.

They were thin this night, and so visibility was still good. Another crack broke the silence. *There,* Wax thought. Steel burning with a comfortable warmth within him, he leaped over another street in a flurry of mistcoat tassels, spinning mist, and calling wind.

He landed softly, then raised his gun in front of him as he ran in a crouch across the roof. He reached the edge and looked down. Just below him, someone had taken refuge behind a pile of boxes near the mouth of an alley. In the dark, misty night, Wax couldn't make out many details, but the person was armed with a rifle resting on a box. The barrel was pointed toward a group of people down the street who wore the distinctive domed hats of city constables.

Wax Pushed out lightly from himself in all directions, setting up his steel bubble. A latch on a trapdoor at his feet rattled as his Allomancy affected it. He peered down at the man firing upon the constables. It would be good to do something of actual value in this city, rather than just standing around chatting with the overdressed and the overprivileged.

He dropped a bullet casing, and his Allomancy pressed it down onto the rooftop beneath him. He Pushed more forcefully on it, launching himself up and through the swirling mists. He decreased his weight dramatically and pushed on a window latch as he fell, positioning himself so he landed right in the middle of the alleyway.

With his steel, he could see lines pointing toward four different figures in front of him. Even as he landed—the men muttering curses and spinning toward him—he raised his Sterrion and sighted on the first of the street thugs. The man had a patchy beard and eyes as dark as the night itself.

Wax heard a woman whimpering.

He froze, hand steady, but unable to move. The memories, so carefully dammed up in his head, crashed through and flooded his mind. Lessie, held with a garrote around her neck. A single shot. Blood on the redbrick walls.

The street thug jerked his rifle toward Wax and fired. The steel bubble barely deflected it, and the bullet tugged through the fabric of Wax's coat, just missing his ribs.

He tried to fire, but that whimpering …

Oh, Harmony, he thought, appalled at himself. He pointed his gun downward and fired into the ground, then Pushed on the bullet and threw himself backward, up out of the alleyway.

Bullets pierced the mists all around him. Steel bubble or not, he should have fallen to one of them. It was pure luck that saved his life as he landed on another roof and rolled to a stop, prone, protected from the gunfire by a parapet wall.

Wax gasped for breath, hand on his revolver. *Idiot,* he thought to himself. *Fool.* He'd never frozen in combat before, even when he'd been green. *Never.* This, however, was the first time he'd tried to shoot someone since the disaster in the ruined church.

He wanted to duck away in shame, but he gritted his teeth and crawled forward to the edge of the roof. The men were still down there. He could see them better now, gathering and preparing to make a run for it. They probably wanted nothing to do with an Allomancer.

He aimed at the apparent leader. However, before Wax could fire, the man fell to gunfire from the constables. In moments, the alleyway swarmed with men in uniforms. Wax raised his Sterrion beside his head, breathing deeply.

I could have fired that time, he told himself. *It was just that one moment where I froze. It wouldn't have happened again.* He told himself this several times as the constables pulled the malefactors out of the alley one at a time.

There was no woman. The whimpering he'd heard had been a gang member who'd taken a bullet before Wax arrived. The man was still groaning in pain as they took him away.

The constables hadn't seen Wax. He turned and disappeared into the night.

* * *

A short time later, Wax arrived at Ladrian Mansion. His residence in the city, his ancestral home. He didn't feel like he belonged there, but he used it anyway.

The stately home lacked expansive grounds, though it did have four elegant stories, with balconies and a nice patio garden out back. Wax dropped a coin and bounded over the front fence, landing atop the gatehouse. *My carriage is back,* he noticed. Not surprising. They were getting used to him; he wasn't certain whether to be pleased by that or ashamed of it.

He Pushed off the gates—which rattled at the weight—and landed on a fourth-story balcony. Coinshots had to learn precision, unlike their cousin Allomancers, Ironpullers—also known as Lurchers. Those would just pick a target and Pull themselves toward it, but they usually had to grind up the side of a building, making noise. Coinshots had to be delicate, careful, accurate.

The window was unlatched; he'd left it that way. He didn't fancy dealing with people at the moment; his abortive confrontation with the criminals had rattled him. He slipped into the darkened room, then padded across it and listened at the door. No sounds in the hallway. He opened the door silently, then moved out.

The hallway was dark, and he was no Tineye, capable of enhancing his senses. He felt his way with each step, being careful not to trip on the edge of a rug or bump into a pedestal.

His rooms were at the end of the hallway. He reached for the brass knob with gloved fingers. Excellent. He carefully pushed the door open, stepping into his bedroom. Now he just had to—

A door opened on the other side of his room, letting in bright yellow light. Wax froze in place, though his hand quickly reached into his coat for one of his Sterrions.

An aging man stood in the doorway, holding a large candelabrum. He wore a tidy black uniform and white gloves. He raised an eyebrow at Wax. "High Lord Ladrian," he said, "I see that you've returned."

"Um…" Wax said, sheepishly removing his hand from inside his coat.

"Your bath is drawn, my lord."

"I didn't ask for a bath."

"Yes, but considering your night's … entertainments, I thought it prudent to prepare one for you." The butler sniffed. "Gunpowder?"

"Er, yes."

"I trust my lord didn't shoot anyone too important."

No, Wax thought. *No, I couldn't.*

Tillaume stood there, stiff, disapproving. He didn't say the words he was undoubtedly thinking: that Wax's disappearance from the party had caused a minor scandal, that it would be even *more* difficult to procure a proper bride now. He didn't say that he was disappointed. He didn't say these things because he was, after all, a proper lord's servant.

Besides, he could say them all with a glance anyway.

"Shall I draft a letter of apology to Lady Cett, my lord? I believe she will expect it, considering that you sent one to Lord Stanton."

"Yes, that would be well," Wax said. He lowered his fingers to his belt, feeling the metal vials there, the revolver at each hip, the weight of the shotgun strapped inside his coat. *What am I doing? I'm acting like a fool.*

He suddenly felt exceedingly childish. Leaving a party to go patrolling through the city, looking for trouble? What was wrong with him?

He felt as if he'd been trying to recapture something. A part of the person he'd been before Lessie's death. He had known, deep down, that he might have trouble shooting now and had wanted to prove otherwise.

He’d failed that test.

“My lord,” Tillaume said, stepping closer. “May I speak … boldly, for a moment?”

“You may.”

“The city has a large number of constables,” Tillaume said. “And they are quite capable in their jobs. Our house, however, has but one high lord. Thousands depend on you, sir.” Tillaume nodded his head in respect, then moved to begin lighting some candles in the bedroom.

The butler’s words were true. House Ladrian was one of the most powerful in the city, at least historically. In the city’s government, Wax represented the interests of all of the people his house employed. True, they’d also have a representative based on votes in their guild, but it was Wax they depended on most.

His house was nearly bankrupt—rich in potential, in holdings, and in workers, but poor in cash and connections because of his uncle’s foolishness. If Wax didn’t do something to change that, it could mean jobs lost, poverty, and collapse as other houses pounced on his holdings and seized them for debts not paid.

Wax ran his thumbs along his Sterrions. *The constables handled those street toughs just fine,* he admitted to himself. *They didn’t need me. This city doesn’t need me, not like Weathering did.*

He was trying to cling to what he had been. He wasn’t that person any longer. He couldn’t be. But people did need him for something else.

“Tillaume,” Wax said.

The butler looked back from the candles. The mansion didn’t have electric lights yet, though workmen were coming to install them soon. Something his uncle had paid for before dying, money Wax couldn’t recover now.

“Yes, my lord?” Tillaume asked.

Wax hesitated, then slowly pulled his shotgun from its place inside his coat and set it into the trunk beside his bed, placing it beside a companion he’d left there earlier. He took off his mistcoat, wrapping the thick material over his arm. He held the coat reverently for a moment, then placed it in the trunk. His Sterrion revolvers followed. They weren’t his only guns, but they represented his life in the Roughs.

He closed the lid of the trunk on his old life. “Take this, Tillaume,” Wax said. “Put it somewhere.”

“Yes, my lord,” Tillaume said. “I shall have it ready for you, should you need it again.”

“I won’t be needing it,” Wax said. He had given himself one last night with the mists. A thrilling climb up the tower, an evening spent with the darkness. He chose to focus on that—rather than his failure with the toughs—as his night’s accomplishment.

One final dance.

“Take it, Tillaume,” Wax said, turning away from the trunk. “Put it somewhere safe, but put it away. For good.”

“Yes, my lord,” the butler said softly. He sounded approving.

And that, Wax thought, *is that.* He then walked into the washroom. Wax the lawkeeper was gone.

It was time to be Lord Waxillium Ladrian, Sixteenth High Lord of House Ladrian, residing in the Fourth Octant of Elendel City.

2

SIX MONTHS LATER

“How’s my cravat?” Waxillium asked, studying himself in the mirror, turning to the side and tugging at the silver necktie again.

“Impeccable as always, my lord,” Tillaume said. The butler stood with hands clasped behind his back, a tray with steaming tea sitting beside him on the serving stand. Waxillium hadn’t asked for tea, but Tillaume had brought it anyway. Tillaume had a thing about tea.

“Are you certain?” Waxillium asked, tugging at the cravat again.

“Indeed, my lord.” He hesitated. “I’ll admit, my lord, that I’ve been curious about this for months. You are the first high lord I’ve ever waited upon who can tie a decent cravat. I’d grown quite accustomed to providing that assistance.”

“You learn to do things on your own, when you live out in the Roughs.”

“With all due respect, my lord,” Tillaume said, his normally monotone voice betraying a hint of curiosity, “I wouldn’t have thought that one would need to learn that skill in the Roughs. I wasn’t aware that the denizens of those lands had the slightest concern for matters of fashion and decorum.”

“They don’t,” Waxillium said with a smile, giving one final adjustment to the cravat. “That’s part of why *I* always did. Dressing like a city gentleman had an odd effect on the people out there. Some immediately respected me, others immediately underestimated me. It worked for me in both cases. And, I might add, it was unspeakably satisfying to see the looks on the faces of criminals when they were hauled in by someone they had assumed to be a city dandy.”

“I can imagine, my lord.”

“I did it for myself too,” Waxillium said more softly, regarding himself in the mirror. Silver cravat, green satin vest. Emerald cuff links. Black coat and trousers, stiff through the sleeves and legs. One steel button on his vest among the wooden ones, an old tradition of his. “The clothing was a reminder, Tillaume. The land around me may have been wild, but I didn’t need to be.”

Waxillium took a silver pocket square off his dressing stand, deftly folded it in the proper style, and slipped it into his breast pocket. A sudden chiming rang through the mansion.

“Rust and Ruin,” Waxillium cursed, checking his pocket watch. “They’re early.”

“Lord Harms is known for his punctuality, my lord.”

“Wonderful. Well, let’s get this over with.” Waxillium strode out into the hallway, boots gliding on the green velvet-cut rug. The mansion had changed little during his two-decade absence. Even after six months of living here, it still didn’t feel like it was *his*. The faint smell of his uncle’s pipe smoke still lingered, and the decor was marked by a fondness for deep dark woods and heavy stone sculpture. Despite modern tastes, there were almost no portraits or paintings. As Waxillium knew, many of those had been valuable, and had been sold before his uncle’s death.

Tillaume walked alongside him, hands clasped behind his back. “My lord sounds as though he considers this day’s duty to be a chore.”

“Is it that obvious?” Waxillium grimaced. What did it say about him that he’d rather face down a nest of outlaws—outgunned and outmanned—than meet with Lord Harms and his daughter?

A plump, matronly woman waited at the end of the hallway, wearing a black dress and a white apron. “Oh, Lord Ladrian,” she said with fondness. “Your mother would be so pleased to see this day!”

“Nothing has been decided yet, Miss Grimes,” Waxillium said as the woman joined the two of them, walking along the balustrade of the second-floor gallery.

“She *did* so hope that you’d marry a fine lady someday,” Miss Grimes said. “You should have heard how she worried, all those years.”

Waxillium tried to ignore the way those words twisted at his heart. He *hadn’t* heard how his mother worried. He’d hardly ever taken time to write his parents or his sister, and had only visited that one time, just after the railway reached Weathering.

Well, he was making good on his obligations now. Six months of work, and he was finally getting his feet under him and pulling House Ladrian—along with its many forgeworkers and seamstresses—from the brink of financial collapse. The last step came today.

Waxillium reached the top of the staircase, then hesitated. “No,” he said, “I mustn’t rush in. Need to give them time to make themselves comfortable.”

“That is—” Tillaume began, but Waxillium cut him off by turning the other way and marching back along the balustrade.

“Miss Grimes,” Waxillium said, “are there other matters that will need my attention today?”

“You wish to hear of them now?” she asked, frowning as she bustled to keep up.

“Anything to keep my mind occupied, dear woman,” Waxillium said. Rust and Ruin … he was so nervous that he caught himself reaching inside his jacket to finger the grip of his Immerling 44-S.

It was a fine weapon; not as good as one of Ranette’s make, but a proper, and small, sidearm for a gentleman. He’d decided he would be a lord, and not a lawman, but that didn’t mean he was going to go about unarmed. That … well, that would just be plain insane.

“There is one matter,” Miss Grimes said, grimacing. She was the Ladrian house steward, and had been for the last twenty years. “We lost another shipment of steel last night.”

Waxillium froze on the walkway. “What? Again!”

“Unfortunately, my lord.”

“Damn it. I’m starting to think the thieves are targeting only us.”

“It’s only our second shipment,” she said. “House Tekiel has lost five shipments so far.”

“What are the details?” he asked. “The disappearance. Where did it happen?”

“Well—”

“No, don’t tell me,” he said, raising a hand. “I can’t afford to be distracted.”

Miss Grimes gave him a flat look, since that was probably why she’d avoided telling him about it before his meeting with Lord Harms. Waxillium rested a hand on the railing, and felt his left eye twitch. Someone was out there, running an organized, highly efficient operation stealing the contents of entire railcars. They were being called the Vanishers. Perhaps he could poke around a little and …

No, he told himself sternly. *It is not my duty. Not anymore.* He would go to the proper authorities, perhaps hire some guards or personal investigators. He would not go chasing bandits himself.

"I'm sure the constables will find those responsible and bring them to justice," Waxillium said with some difficulty. "Do you think that's long enough to make Lord Harms wait? I think that's long enough. It hasn't been too long, has it?" Waxillium turned and walked back the way he'd come. Tillaume rolled his eyes as he passed.

Waxillium reached the stairs. A young man in a green Ladrian vest and a white shirt was climbing them. "Lord Ladrian!" Kip said. "Post has arrived."

"Any parcels?"

"No, my lord," the boy said, handing over a signet-sealed letter as Waxillium passed. "Only this. Looked important."

"An invitation to the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner," Miss Grimes guessed. "Might be a good place to have your first public appearance with Miss Harms."

"The details haven't been decided!" Waxillium protested as they stopped at the bottom of the staircase. "I've barely broached the topic with Lord Harms, yet you practically have us married. It's entirely possible that they will upend this entire matter, like what happened with Lady Entrone."

"It will go well, young master," Miss Grimes said. She reached up, adjusting the silk square in his pocket. "I've got a Soother's sense for these matters."

"You do realize I'm forty-two years old? 'Young master' doesn't exactly fit any longer."

She patted his cheek. Miss Grimes considered any unmarried man to be a child—which was terribly unfair, considering that *she* had never married. He refrained from speaking to her about Lessie; most of his family back in the city hadn't known about her.

"Right, then," Waxillium said, turning and striding toward the sitting room. "Into the maw of the beast I go."

Limmi, head of the ground-floor staff, waited by the doorway. She raised her hand as Waxillium approached, as if to speak, but he slid the dinner-party invitation between two of her fingers.

"Have an affirmative response drafted to this, if you would, Limmi," he said. "Indicate I'll be dining with Miss Harms and her father, but hold the letter until I'm done with my conference here. I'll let you know whether to send it or not."

"Yes, my lord, but—"

"It's all right," he said, pushing the door open. "I mustn't keep the…"

Lord Harms and his daughter were *not* in the sitting room. Instead, Waxillium found a lanky man with a round, sharp-chinned face. He was about thirty years of age, and had a few days of stubble on the chin and cheeks. He wore a wide-brimmed Roughs-style hat, the sides curving up slightly, and had on a leather duster. He was playing with one of the palm-sized upright clocks on the mantel.

"'Ello Wax," the man said brightly. He held up the clock. "Can I trade you for this?"

Waxillium swiftly pulled the door shut behind him. "Wayne? What are you *doing* here?"

"Looking at your stuff, mate," Wayne said. He held up the clock appraisingly. "Worth what, three or four bars? I've got a bottle of good whiskey that might be worth the same."

"You have to get out of here!" Waxillium said. "You're supposed to be in Weathering. Who's watching the place?"

"Barl."

"Barl! He's a miscreant."

"So am I."

"Yes, but you're the miscreant *I* chose to do the job. You could have at least sent for Miles."

"Miles?" Wayne said. "Mate, Miles is a right *horrible* human being. He'd rather shoot a man than bother actually finding out if the bloke was guilty or not."

"Miles keeps his town clean," Waxillium said. "And he's saved my life a couple of times. This is beside the point. I told *you* to watch over Weathering."

Wayne tipped his hat to Waxillium. "True, Wax, but you ain't a lawkeeper no longer. And me, I've got important stuff to be about." He looked at the clock, then pocketed it and set a small bottle of whiskey on the mantel in its place. "Now, sir, I'll need to be asking you a few questions.” He pulled a small notepad and pencil from inside his duster. “Where were you last night at around midnight?”

“What does that—”

Waxillium was interrupted by chimes sounding at the door again. “Rust and Ruin! These are high-class people, Wayne. I’ve spent months persuading them that I’m not a ruffian. I need you *out* of here.” Waxillium walked forward, trying to usher his friend toward the far exit.

“Now, that’s right suspicious behavior, innit?” Wayne said, scrawling something on his notepad. “Dodging questions, acting all anxious. What are you hiding, sir?”

“Wayne,” Waxillium said, grabbing the other man’s arm. “Part of me is appreciative that you’d come all this way to aggravate me, and I *am* glad to see you. But *now is not the time*.”

Wayne grinned. “You assume I’m here for you. Don’t you think that’s a pinch arrogant?”

“What else would you be here for?”

“Shipment of foodstuffs,” Wayne said. “Railway car left Elendel four days ago and arrived in Weathering with the entire contents of a single car empty. Now, I hear that you recently lost two shipments of your own to these ‘Vanishers.’ I’ve come to question you. Right suspicious, as I said.”

“Suspicious … Wayne, I *lost* two shipments. I’m the one who got robbed! Why would that make me a suspect?”

“How am I to know how your devious, criminal genius mind works, mate?”

Footsteps sounded outside the room. Waxillium glanced at the door, then back at Wayne. “Right now, my criminal genius mind is wondering if I can stuff your corpse anywhere that wouldn’t be too obvious.”

Wayne grinned, stepping back.

The door opened.

Waxillium spun, looking as Limmi sheepishly held the door open. A corpulent man in a very fine suit stood there, holding a dark wooden cane. He had mustaches that drooped all the way down to his thick neck, and his waistcoat framed a deep red cravat.

“… saying it doesn’t matter whom he’s seeing!” Lord Harms said. “He’ll want to speak with me! We had an *appointment*, and…” Lord Harms paused, realizing the door was open. “Ah!” He strode into the room.

He was followed by a stern-looking woman with golden hair fixed into a tight bun—his daughter, Steris—and a younger woman who Waxillium didn't recognize.

"Lord Ladrian," Harms said, "I find it *very* unbefitting to be made to wait. And who is this that you're meeting with in my stead?"

Waxillium sighed. "It's my old—"

"Uncle!" Wayne said, stepping forward, voice altered to sound gruff and lose all of its rural accent. "I'm his uncle Maksil. Popped in unexpectedly this morning, my dear man."

Waxillium raised an eyebrow as Wayne stepped forward. He'd removed his hat and duster, and had plastered his upper lip with a realistic-looking fake mustache with a bit of gray in it. He was scrunching his face up just slightly to produce a few extra wrinkles at the eyes. It was a good disguise, making him look like he might be a few years older than Waxillium, rather than ten years younger.

Waxillium glanced over his shoulder. The duster sat folded on the floor beside one of the couches, hat atop it, a pair of dueling canes lying crossed beside the pile. Waxillium hadn't even noticed the swap—of course, Wayne had naturally done it while inside a speed bubble. Wayne was a Slider, a bendalloy Allomancer, capable of creating a bubble of compressed time around himself. He often used the power to change costumes.

He was also Twinborn, like Waxillium, though his Feruchemical ability—healing quickly from wounds—wasn't so useful outside of combat. Still, the two made for a very potent combination.

"Uncle, you say?" Lord Harms asked, taking Wayne's hand and shaking it.

"On the mother's side!" Wayne said. "Not the Ladrian side, of course. Otherwise I'd be running this place, eh?" He sounded nothing like himself, but that was Wayne's specialty. He said that three-quarters of a disguise was in the accent and voice. "I've wanted for a long time to come check up on the lad. He's had something of a rough-and-tumble past, you know. He needs a firm hand to make certain he doesn't return to such unpleasant ways."

"I've often thought the very same thing!" Lord Harms said. "I assume we're given leave to sit, Lord Ladrian?"

"Yes, of course," Waxillium said, covertly glaring at Wayne. *Really?* that glare said. *We're doing this?*

Wayne just shrugged. Then he turned and took Steris's hand and bowed his head politely. "And who is this lovely creature?"

"My daughter, Steris." Harms sat. "Lord Ladrian? You didn't tell your uncle of our arrival?"

"I was so surprised by his appearance," Waxillium said, "that I did not have an opportunity." He took Steris's hand and bowed his head to her as well.

She looked him up and down with a critical gaze, and then her eyes flicked toward the duster and hat in the corner. Her lips turned down. Doubtless she assumed they were his.

"This is my cousin Marasi," Steris said, nodding to the woman behind her. Marasi was dark-haired and large-eyed, with bright red lips. She looked down demurely as soon as Waxillium turned to her. "She has spent most of her life in the Outer Estates and is rather timid, so please don't upset her."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Waxillium said. He waited until the women were seated beside Lord Harms, then sat on the smaller sofa facing them, and facing the doorway. There was another exit from the room, but he'd discovered that there was a squeaky floorboard leading to it, which was ideal. This way, someone couldn't sneak up on him. Lawman or lord, he didn't fancy getting shot in the back.

Wayne primly settled himself in a chair directly to Waxillium's right. They all stared at one another for an extended moment. Wayne yawned.

"Well," Waxillium said. "Perhaps I should begin by asking after your health."

"Perhaps you should," Steris replied.

"Er. Yes. How's your health?"

"Suitable."

"So is Waxillium," Wayne added.

They all turned to him.

"You know," he said. "He's wearing a suit, and all. Suitable. Ahem. Is that mahogany?"

"This?" Lord Harms said, holding up his cane. "Indeed. It's a family heirloom."

"My lord Waxillium," Steris cut in, voice stern. She did not seem to enjoy small talk. "Perhaps we can dispense with empty prattle. We all know the nature of this meeting."

"We do?" Wayne asked.

"Yes," Steris said, voice cool. "Lord Waxillium. You are in the position of having an unfortunate reputation. Your uncle, may he rest with the Hero, tarnished the Ladrian name with his social reclusiveness, occasional reckless forays into politics, and blatant adventurism. You have come from the Roughs, lending no small additional measure of poor reputation to the house, particularly considering your insulting actions to various houses during your first few weeks in town. Above all this, your house is nearly destitute.

"We, however, are in a desperate circumstance of our own. Our financial status is excellent, but our name is unknown in the highest of society. My father has no male heir upon which to bestow his family name, and so a union between our houses makes perfect sense."

"How very logical of you, my dear," Wayne said, the upper-class accent rolling off his tongue as if he'd been born with it.

"Indeed," she said, still watching Waxillium. She reached into her satchel. "Your letters and conversations with my father have been enough to persuade us of your serious intent, and during these last few months in the city your public comportment has proven more promisingly sober than your initial boorishness. So I have taken the liberty of drawing up an agreement that I think will suit our needs."

"An … agreement?" Waxillium asked.

"Oh, I'm so eager to see it," Wayne added. He reached into his pocket absently and got out something that Waxillium couldn't quite discern.

The "agreement" turned out to be a large document, at least twenty pages long. Steris handed one copy to Waxillium and one to her father, and retained another for herself.

Lord Harms coughed into his hand. "I suggested she write down her thoughts," he said. "And … well, my daughter is a very thorough woman."

"I can see that," Waxillium said.

"I suggest that you never ask her to pass the milk," Wayne added under his breath, so only Waxillium could hear. "As she seems likely to throw a cow at you, just to be certain the job is done thoroughly."

"The document is in several parts," Steris said. "The first is an outline of our courtship phase, wherein we make obvious—but not too speedy—progress toward engagement. We take just long enough for society to begin associating us as a couple. The engagement mustn't be so quick as to seem a scandal, but cannot come too slowly either. Eight months should, by my estimates, fulfill our purposes."

"I see," Waxillium said, flipping through the pages. Tillaume entered, bringing a tray of tea and cakes, and deposited it on a serving table beside Wayne.

Waxillium shook his head, closing the contract. "Doesn't this seem a little … stiff to you?"

"Stiff?"

"I mean, shouldn't there be room for romance?"

"There is," Steris said. "Page thirteen. Upon marriage, there shall be no more than three conjugal encounters per week and no fewer than one until a suitable heir is provided. After that, the same numbers apply to a two-week span."

"Ah, of course," Waxillium said. "Page thirteen." He glanced at Wayne. Was that a *bullet* the other man had taken from his pocket? Wayne was rolling it between his fingers.

"If that is not enough to satisfy your needs," Steris added, "the next page details proper mistress protocols."

"Wait," Waxillium said, looking away from Wayne. "Your document allows *mistresses*?"

"Of course," Steris said. "They are a simple fact of life, and so it's better to account for them than to ignore them. In the document, you will find requirements for your potential mistresses along with the means by which discretion will be maintained."

"I see," Waxillium said.

"Of course," Steris continued, "I will follow the same guidelines."

"You plan to take a mistress, my lady?" Wayne asked, perking up.

"I would be allowed my own dalliances," she said. "Usually the coachman is the object of choice. I would abstain until heirs were produced, of course. There mustn't be any confusion about lineage."

"Of course," Waxillium said.

"It's in the contract," she said. "Page fifteen."

"I don't doubt that it is."

Lord Harms coughed into his hand again. Marasi, Steris's cousin, maintained a blank expression, though she looked down at her feet during the conversation. Why had she been brought?

“Daughter,” Lord Harms said, “perhaps we should move the conversation to less personal topics for a span.”

“Very well,” Steris said. “There *are* a few things I wanted to know. Are you a religious man, Lord Ladrian?”

“I follow the Path,” Waxillium said.

“Hmmm,” she said, tapping her fingers against her contract. “Well, that’s a safe choice, if somewhat dull. I, for one, have never understood why people would follow a religion whose god *specifically* prohibits worshipping him.”

“It’s complicated.”

“So Pathians like to say. With the same breath as you try to explain how simple your religion is.”

“That’s complicated too,” Waxillium said. “A simple kind of complicated, though. You’re a Survivorist, I assume?”

“I am.”

Delightful, Waxillium thought. Well, Survivorists weren’t *too* bad. Some of them, at least. He stood up. Wayne was still playing with that round. “Would anyone else like some tea?”

“No,” Steris said with a wave of her hand, looking through her document.

“Yes, please,” Marasi said softly.

Waxillium crossed the room to the tea stand.

“Those are very nice bookshelves,” Wayne said. “Wish I had shelves like those. My, my, my. And … we’re in.”

Waxillium turned. The three guests had glanced at the shelves, and as they turned away, Wayne had started burning bendalloy and thrown up a speed bubble.

The bubble was about five feet across, including only Wayne and Waxillium, and once Wayne had it up he couldn’t move it. Years of familiarity let Waxillium discern the boundary of the bubble, which was marked by a faint wavering of the air. For those inside the bubble, time would flow much more quickly than for those outside.

“Well?” Waxillium asked.

“Oh, I think the quiet one’s kinda cute,” Wayne said, his accent back in place. “The tall one is insane, though. Rust on my arms, but she is.”

Waxillium poured himself some tea. Harms and the two women looked frozen as they sat on their couch, almost like statues. Wayne was flaring his metal, using as much strength as he could to create a few private moments.

These bubbles could be very useful, though not in the way most people expected. You couldn’t shoot out of them—well, you could, but something about the barrier interfered with objects passing through it. If you fired a shot in a speed bubble, the bullet would slow as soon as it hit ordinary time and would be moved erratically off course. That made it nearly impossible to aim from within one.

“She’s a very good match,” Waxillium said. “It’s an ideal situation for both of us.”

“Look, mate. Just because Lessie—”

“This is *not* about Lessie.”

“Whoa, hey.” Wayne raised a hand. “No need to get angry.”

“I’m not—” Waxillium took a deep breath, then continued more softly. “I’m not angry. But it’s not about Lessie. This is about my duties.”

Damn you, Wayne. I’d almost gotten myself to stop thinking about her. What would Lessie say, if she saw what he was doing? Laugh, probably. Laugh at how ridiculous it was, laugh at his discomfort. She hadn’t been the jealous type, perhaps because she’d never had any reason to be. With a woman like her, why would Waxillium have wanted to look elsewhere?

Nobody would ever live up to her, but fortunately it didn’t matter. Steris’s contract actually seemed a good thing, in that regard. It would help him divide himself. Maybe help with a little of the pain.

“This *is* my duty now,” Waxillium repeated.

“Your duties used to involve saving folks,” Wayne said, “not marrying ’em.”

Waxillium crouched down beside the chair. “Wayne. I can’t go back to what I was. You sauntering in here, meddling in my life, isn’t going to change that. I’m a different person now.”

“If you were going to become a different person, couldn’t you have chosen one without such an ugly face?”

“Wayne, this is *serious*.”

Wayne raised his hand, spinning the cartridge between his fingers and proffering it. “So is this.”

“What *is* that?”

“Bullet. You shoot folks with ’em. Hopefully bad ones—or at least ones what owes you a bar or two.”

“Wayne—”

“They’re turning back.” Wayne set the cartridge on the tea-serving tray.

“But—”

“Time to cough. Three. Two. One.”

Waxillium cursed under his breath, but pocketed the round and stood back up. He started coughing loudly as the speed bubble collapsed, restoring normal time. To the three visitors, only seconds had passed, and to their ears Waxillium and Wayne’s conversation would be sped up to the point that most of it would be inaudible. The coughing would cover anything else.

None of the three visitors seemed to have noticed anything unusual. Waxillium poured the tea—it was a deep cherry color today, likely a sweet fruit tea—and brought a cup over to Marasi. She took it, and he sat down, holding his own cup in one hand, taking out and gripping the cartridge with the other. Both the casing and the medium-caliber bullet’s jacket looked like steel, but the entire thing seemed too light. He frowned, hefting it.

Blood on her face. Blood on the brick wall.

He shivered, fighting off those memories. *Damn you, Wayne,* he thought again.

“The tea is delicious,” Marasi said softly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Waxillium said, forcing his mind back to the conversation. “Lady Steris, I will consider this contract. Thank you for producing it. But really, I was hoping this meeting might allow me to learn more about you.”

“I have been working on an autobiography,” she said. “Perhaps I will send you a chapter or two of it by post.”

“That’s … very unconventional of you,” Waxillium said. “Though it would be appreciated. But please, tell me of yourself. What are your interests?”

“Normally, I like plays.” She grimaced. “At the Coolerim, actually.”

“Am I missing something?” Waxillium asked.

“The Coolerim Playhouse,” Wayne said, leaning forward. “Two nights ago, it was robbed in the middle of the performance.”

“Haven’t you heard?” Lord Harms asked. “It was in all the broadsheets.”

“Was anyone harmed?”

“Not at the event itself,” Lord Harms said, “but they did take a hostage as they escaped.”

“Such a *horrid* thing,” Steris said. “Nobody has heard from Armal yet.” She looked sick.

"You knew her?" Wayne asked, his accent slipping faintly as he grew interested.

"Cousin," Steris said.

"Same as…" Waxillium asked, nodding toward Marasi.

The three regarded him with confused expressions for a moment, but then Lord Harms jumped in. "Ah, no. Different side of the family."

"Interesting," Waxillium said, leaning back in his chair, tea sitting ignored in his hand. "And ambitious. Robbing an entire playhouse? How many of the robbers were there?"

"Dozens," Marasi said. "Maybe as many as thirty, so the reports say."

"Quite a band. That means as many as another eight just to drive them away. And vehicles for escaping. Impressive."

"It's the Vanishers," Marasi said. "The ones stealing from the railway also."

"That hasn't been proven," Wayne replied, pointing at her.

"No. But one of the witnesses from a railway robbery described several men who were at the theater robbery."

"Wait," Waxillium said. "There were witnesses to one of the railway robberies? I thought they happened in secret. Something about a ghostly railcar appearing on the tracks?"

"Yes," Wayne said. "The railway engineers stop to investigate and—probably—panic. But the phantom railcar vanishes before they can investigate it. They continue on, but when they reach the end of the line, one of their train's cars is empty. Still locked, no signs of forced entry. But the goods are all gone."

"So nobody sees the culprits," Waxillium said.

"The recent ones have been different," Marasi said, growing animated. "They've started robbing passenger cars as well. When the train stops because of the phantom on the tracks, men jump into the cars and start going through, collecting jewelry and pocketbooks from the occupants. They take a woman hostage—threatening to kill her if anyone follows—and go. The freight car is still robbed as well."

"Curious," Waxillium said.

"Yes," Marasi said. "I think—"

"My dear," Lord Harms cut in. "You are bothering Lord Ladrian."

Marasi blushed, then looked down.

"It wasn't a bother," Waxillium said, tapping his teacup with his finger. "It—"

"Is that a *bullet* in your fingers?" Steris asked, pointing.

Waxillium looked down, realizing that he was rolling the cartridge between forefinger and thumb. He closed his fist around it before his memories could return. "It's nothing." He shot a glare at Wayne.

The other man mouthed something. *Push on it.*

"You are *quite* certain your unconventional past is behind you, Lord Ladrian?" Steris asked.

"Oh, he's certain," Wayne said, grimacing. "You don't have to worry about *him* being unconventional. Why, he's downright boring! Unbelievably, comically, nonsensically *boring*. You could squeeze more excitement out of a beggar waiting in line at the soup kitchen on rat meat day. It—"

"Thank you, *Uncle*," Waxillium said dryly. "Yes, Steris, my past is just that. Past. I am committed to my duties as head of House Ladrian."

"Very well," she said. "We will need a formal entrance into high society as a couple. A public event of some sort."

"How about the Yomen-Ostlin wedding dinner?" Waxillium said absently. *Push on it.* "I received an invitation just this morning."

"An excellent idea," Lord Harms said. "We were invited as well."

Push on it. Waxillium reached into his left sleeve and covertly took a small pinch of steel shavings from the pouch he kept there. He dropped it into his tea and took a drink. That didn't give him much of a reserve, but it was enough.

He burned the steel, the familiar lines of blue springing up around him. They pointed to all nearby sources of metal.

Except the one in his fingers.

Aluminum, he realized. *No wonder it's light.*

Aluminum and a few of its alloys were Allomantically inert; you couldn't Push or Pull on them. It was also *very* expensive. It cost more than even gold or platinum.

The bullet was designed to kill Coinshots and Lurchers, men like Waxillium himself. That gave him a shiver, though he gripped the round more tightly. There were days when he'd have given his best gun for a few aluminum bullets, though he hadn't heard of an alloy that would produce a bullet with sound ballistics.

Where? he mouthed to Wayne. *Where did you find it?*

Wayne just nodded to the guests, who were looking right at Waxillium.

"Are you quite all right, Lord Ladrian?" Steris asked. "I know a good zinc counselor if you have need of some emotional aid."

"Er … no. Thank you. I am quite all right, and I think this has been a very productive meeting. Wouldn't you agree?"

"That depends," she said, rising, apparently taking that as an invitation to end the conversation. "The wedding party is on the morrow, I believe. I can count on you having reviewed the contract by then?"

"You can," Waxillium said, rising as well.

"*I* think this meeting was wonderful," Wayne said as he stood. "You're just what my nephew needs, Lady Steris! A firm hand. None of this rabble-rousing he's been used to."

"I agree!" Lord Harms said. "Lord Ladrian, perhaps your uncle can attend the dinner—"

"No," Waxillium said quickly before Wayne could say anything. "No, unfortunately, he has to return to his estates. Told me just earlier. He has a very important foaling to attend."

"Oh, well then," Lord Harms said, helping Marasi to her feet. "We will send you word of confirmation once we have accepted the Yomen invitation."

"And I will do likewise," Waxillium said, escorting them to the door of the room. "Farewell until then." Tillaume bowed to them there, then escorted them out. Their departure felt rushed to Waxillium, but he was relieved to see them go. Considering Wayne's sudden intrusion, that had actually gone pretty well. Nobody had ended up trying to shoot him.

"Nice bunch," Wayne said. "I now see what you're doing. With a wife and in-laws like those, you'll feel quite at home here—just like the jailhouse and its occupants back in Weathering!"

"Very nice," Waxillium said under his breath, waving one last time as the Harms family walked out the mansion doors. "Where did you get the bullet?"

"It was dropped at the theater robbery. Traded the constables for it this morning."

Waxillium closed his eyes. Wayne had a very liberal interpretation of what "trading" entailed.

“Oh, don’t get that way,” Wayne said. “I left them a nice cobblestone for it. I think Steris and her pop are convinced you’re a loon, by the way.” He grinned.

“That’s nothing new. My association with you has been convincing people I’m insane for years now.”

“Ha! And here I thought you’d lost your sense of humor.” Wayne walked back into the room. He slid his pencil out of his pocket as he passed a table, trading it for one of Waxillium’s pens.

“My humor isn’t lost, Wayne,” Waxillium said, “just strained. What I told you is true, and this bullet doesn’t change anything.”

“Maybe it doesn’t,” Wayne said, retrieving his hat, duster, and dueling canes. “But I’m still gonna see what I can find.”

“It’s not your job.”

“And it wasn’t your job to start hunting down criminals out in the Roughs. Doesn’t change what needs to be done, mate.” Wayne walked up to Waxillium, then handed him the hat. Once Waxillium took it, Wayne threw on his coat.

“Wayne…”

“People are being taken, Wax,” he said, taking back his hat and putting it on. “Four hostages so far. None returned. Stealing jewelry is one thing. Taking food from Roughs towns is another. Kidnapping people … well, there’s something goin’ on here. I’m gonna find out what it is. With or without you.”

“Without me.”

“Fine.” He hesitated. “But I need something, Wax. A place to look. You always did the thinking.”

“Yes, having a brain helps with that, surprisingly.”

Wayne narrowed his eyes at him. Then he raised his eyebrows, pleadingly.

“All right,” Waxillium said, sighing and fetching his teacup. “How many robberies now?”

“Eight. Seven railway cars and, most recently, the theater.”

“Four hostages?”

“Yeah. Across three of the latest robberies. Two were taken from one of the trains, then one from the robbery at the theater. All four hostages are women.”

“Easier to overpower,” Waxillium said idly, tapping his cup, “and more likely to make the men worry about getting them killed if they try to give chase.”

“Do you need to know what was stolen?” Wayne said, reaching into the pocket of his duster. “I traded one of the constables for a list.…”

“It doesn’t matter.” Waxillium took a drink from his cup. “Or, at least, most of it probably doesn’t. It’s not about the robberies.”

“It’s … not?”

“No. Large gang. Well funded—too well funded.” He pulled out the round and looked it over. “If they really wanted money, they’d be robbing gold transports or banks. The robberies are probably a distraction. If you want a man’s horses, sometimes the best thing to do is let his hogs loose. While he’s chasing them down, you ride off.

“I’d lay money on these Vanishers being after something else, something unlikely. Perhaps an item that is easy to overlook in all that has been taken. Or maybe it’s really about extortion—and they plan to start asking for protection money from people in town. See if anyone’s been contacted about that. I haven’t, by the way.

“If that goes nowhere, look at the hostages. One of them might have been carrying something that was the *real* target of the robbery. I wouldn’t be surprised if this turned out to be about clandestine blackmail.”

“But they robbed a few trains before taking any hostages.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “And they got away with it. There was no reason to expose themselves by robbing passengers if they could make off with cargo unseen and unstopped. They’re after something else, Wayne. Trust me.”

“All right.” The wiry man rubbed his face, then finally pulled off the fake mustache. He stuffed it into his pocket. “But tell me. Don’t you even want to know? Doesn’t it itch at you?”

“No.” That wasn’t completely true.

Wayne snorted. “I’d believe you if you could say that without your eye twitching, mate.” He nodded toward the bullet. “I notice you didn’t offer to give that back.”

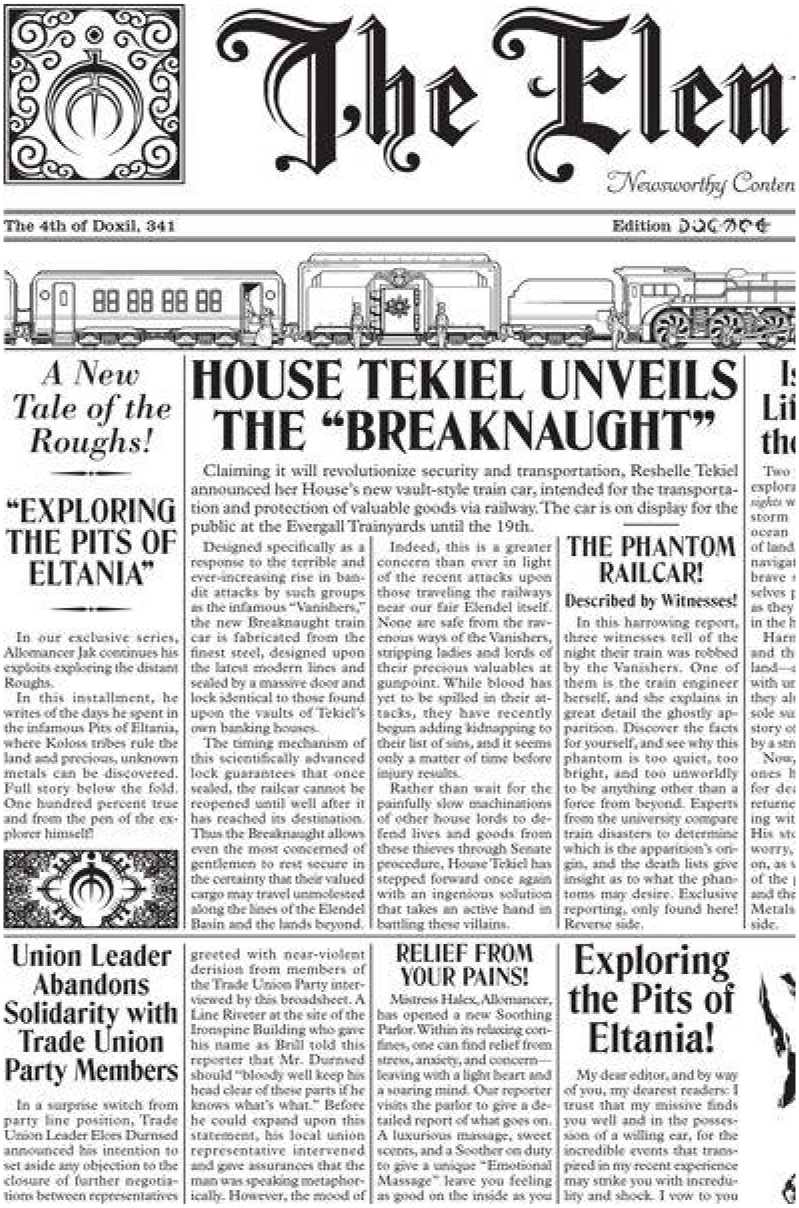
“I didn’t.” Waxillium pocketed it.

“And you still wear your metalminds,” Wayne said, nodding to the bracers hidden mostly by the cuffs of Waxillium’s sleeves. “Not to mention that you're still keeping steel inside your sleeve. I noticed a gun catalogue over on the table, too."

"A man must have hobbies."

"If you say so," Wayne said, then stepped forward, tapping Waxillium on the chest. "But you know what I think? I think you're looking for excuses to not let go. This thing, it's who you are. And no mansion, no marriage, and no mere *title* is going to change that." Wayne tipped his hat. "You're meant to be helping people, mate. It's what you do."

With that, Wayne left, his duster brushing against the doorframe as he walked out.



The Elen

Newsworthy Conten

The 4th of Doxil, 341

Edition

A New Tale of the Roughs!

"EXPLORING THE PITS OF ELTANIA"

In our exclusive series, Allomancer Jak continues his exploits exploring the distant Roughs.

In this installment, he writes of the days he spent in the infamous Pits of Eltania, where Koloss tribes rule the land and precious, unknown metals can be discovered. Full story below the fold. One hundred percent true and from the pen of the explorer himself!

HOUSE TEKIEL UNVEILS THE "BREAKNAUGHT"

Claiming it will revolutionize security and transportation, Reshelle Tekiel announced her House's new vault-style train car, intended for the transportation and protection of valuable goods via railway. The car is on display for the public at the Evergall Trainyards until the 19th.

Designed specifically as a response to the terrible and ever-increasing rise in bandit attacks by such groups as the infamous "Vanishers," the new Breaknaught train car is fabricated from the finest steel, designed upon the latest modern lines and sealed by a massive door and lock identical to those found upon the vaults of Tekiel's own banking houses.

The timing mechanism of this scientifically advanced lock guarantees that once sealed, the railcar cannot be reopened until well after it has reached its destination. Thus the Breaknaught allows even the most concerned of gentlemen to rest secure in the certainty that their valued cargo may travel unmolested along the lines of the Elendel Basin and the lands beyond.

Indeed, this is a greater concern than ever in light of the recent attacks upon those traveling the railways near our fair Elendel itself. None are safe from the ravenous ways of the Vanishers, stripping ladies and lords of their precious valuables at gunpoint. While blood has yet to be spilled in their attacks, they have recently begun adding kidnapping to their list of sins, and it seems only a matter of time before injury results.

Rather than wait for the painfully slow machinations of other house lords to defend lives and goods from these thieves through Senate procedure, House Tekiel has stepped forward once again with an ingenious solution that takes an active hand in battling these villains.

THE PHANTOM RAILCAR!

Described by Witnesses!

In this harrowing report, three witnesses tell of the night their train was robbed by the Vanishers. One of them is the train engineer herself, and she explains in great detail the ghostly apparition. Discover the facts for yourself, and see why this phantom is too quiet, too bright, and too unworldly to be anything other than a force from beyond. Experts from the university compare train disasters to determine which is the apparition's origin, and the death lists give insight as to what the phantoms may desire. Exclusive reporting, only found here! Reverse side.

Union Leader Abandons Solidarity with Trade Union Party Members

In a surprise switch from party line position, Trade Union Leader Eloes Durnsed announced his intention to set aside any objection to the closure of further negotiations between representatives greeted with near-violent derision from members of the Trade Union Party interviewed by this broadsheet. A Line Riveter at the site of the Ironspine Building who gave his name as Brill told this reporter that Mr. Durnsed should "bloody well keep his head clear of these parts if he knows what's what." Before he could expand upon this statement, his local union representative intervened and gave assurances that the man was speaking metaphorically. However, the mood of

RELIEF FROM YOUR PAINS!

Mistress Halex, Allomancer, has opened a new Soothing Parlor. Within its relaxing confines, one can find relief from stress, anxiety, and concern—leaving with a light heart and a soaring mind. Our reporter visits the parlor to give a detailed report of what goes on. A luxurious massage, sweet scents, and a Soother on duty to give a unique "Emotional Massage" leave you feeling as good on the inside as you

Exploring the Pits of Eltania!

My dear editor, and by way of you, my dearest readers: I trust that my missive finds you well and in the possession of a willing ear, for the incredible events that transpired in my recent experience may strike you with incredulity and shock. I vow to you

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Eight hours later, Waxillium stood at an upper window of his mansion. He watched the last broken fragments of a dying day. They dimmed, then grew black. He waited, hoping. But no mist came.

What does it matter? he thought to himself. *You're not going to go outside anyway.* Still, he wished the mists were out; he felt more at peace when they were out there, watching. The world became a different place, one he felt he better understood.

He sighed and crossed his study to the wall. He turned the switch, and the electric lights came on. They were still a wonder to him. Even though he knew the Words of Founding had given hints regarding electricity, what men had achieved still seemed incredible.

He crossed the room to his uncle's desk. His desk. Back in Weathering, Waxillium had used a rough, flimsy table. Now he had a sturdy, smoothly polished desk of stained oak. He sat down and began leafing through ledgers of house finances. It wasn't long, however, before his eyes started flicking toward the stack of broadsheets lying on his easy chair. He'd asked Limmi to go gather a few of them for him.

He usually ignored the broadsheets these days. Reports of crimes had a way of setting his mind running in circles and keeping him from focusing on his business. Of course, now that thoughts of the Vanishers had been planted in his mind, he'd have trouble letting go and doing anything productive, at least until he had scratched a few itches about what they'd been doing.

Perhaps just a little reading, he told himself. *To catch up on current events.* It wouldn't hurt to be informed; in fact, it might be important to his ability to entertain discussions with others.

Waxillium fetched the stack and returned to his desk. He easily found an account of the robberies in the day’s paper. Other broadsheets in the stack had even more information. He’d mentioned the Vanishers to Limmi, and so she’d gathered a few broadsheets that were intended for people who wanted a collection of all of the recent stories on them. These reprinted articles from weeks or even months ago, with the original dates of the stories’ publication. Those types of broadsheets were popular, he could tell, as he had three different ones from three different publishers. It seemed everyone wanted to stay up to date on items they’d missed.

By the dates listed on the reprinted articles, the first robbery had happened much earlier than he’d assumed. Seven months ago, just before he’d arrived back in Elendel. There had been a lapse of four months between the first railway cargo disappearance and the second. The name “Vanishers” hadn’t started being used until this second attack.

The robberies were all similar, save for the one at the playhouse. A train was stopped because of a distraction on the tracks—early on, a fallen tree. Later, a ghostly phantom railcar that appeared from the mists, traveling directly at the train. The engineers stopped in a panic, but the phantom ahead vanished.

The engineers would start their train again. When it reached its destination, one of their cars was found to have been emptied of all goods. People were ascribing all kinds of mystical powers to the robbers, who seemed to be able to pass through walls and locked cargo cars without trouble. *But what goods were stolen?* Waxillium thought, frowning. The reports of the first theft didn’t say, though it did mention the cargo had belonged to Augustin Tekiel.

Tekiel was one of the richest houses in the city, based over in the Second Octant, though it was building its new skyscraper in the financial district of the Fourth Octant. Waxillium read the articles over again, then searched through the broadsheets, scanning them for any further mention of the first robbery before the second occurred.

What’s this? he thought, holding up a broadsheet that included a reprint of a letter Augustin Tekiel had written for publication a few months back. The letter denounced the Elendel constables for failure to protect or recover Tekiel’s goods. The broadsheet had happily printed it, even made a headline of it: “Constables Incompetent, Tekiel Slams.”

Three months. It had taken three months for Tekiel to say anything. Waxillium put aside these compilation broadsheets, then searched through the more recent broadsheets for other mentions. There was no shortage of them; the robberies were dramatic and mysterious, two things that sold a lot of papers.

The second and third robberies had been of steel shipments. Odd, that. An impractically heavy substance to take, and not as valuable as simply robbing the passenger cars. The fourth robbery had been the one that caught Wayne's attention: packaged foodstuffs from a train on its way to the northern Roughs. The fifth robbery had been the first to involve the passengers. The sixth and seventh had done so as well, the seventh being the only time the Vanishers had taken two hostages instead of one.

All three of the later robberies had involved stealing from a freight car as well as from passengers. Metals in two cases, foodstuffs in another case—at least, that was all the newspaper reported. With each case, the details had grown more interesting, as the cargo cars had been better secured. More sophisticated locks, guards riding along. The robberies happened incredibly quickly, considering the weight of goods taken.

Did they use a speed bubble, like Wayne makes? Waxillium thought. But no. You couldn't move in or out of a speed bubble once one was up, and it would be impossible to make one large enough to facilitate this kind of robbery. So far as he knew, at least.

Waxillium continued reading. There were a great many articles with theories, quotes, and eyewitness reports. Many suggested a speed bubble, but editorials cut those to shreds. Too much manpower would be needed, more than could fit in a speed bubble. They thought it more likely that a Feruchemist who could increase his strength was lifting the heavy materials out of the cars and carrying them off.

But to where? And why? And how were they bypassing the locks and the guards? Waxillium cut out articles he found interesting. Few had any solid information.

A soft knock at the door interrupted him in the middle of spreading the articles out on his desk. He looked up to see Tillaume in the doorway holding a tray of tea and a basket, the handle over his arm. "Tea, my lord?"

"That would be wonderful."

Tillaume strode forward and set up a small stand beside the desk, getting a cup and a sharp white napkin. "Do you have a preference?" Tillaume could manufacture dozens of varieties of tea from the simplest of starting points, blending and making what he considered ideal.

“Whatever.”

“My lord. There is *great* importance to tea. It should never merely be ‘whatever.’ Tell me. Are you planning to sleep soon?”

Waxillium looked over the array of cut-out reports. “Definitely not.”

“Very well. Would you prefer something to help clear your mind?”

“That might be nice.”

“Sweet or not?”

“Not.”

“Minty or spicy?”

“Minty.”

“Strong or weak?”

“Er … strong.”

“Excellent,” Tillaume said, taking several jars and some silver spoons from his basket. He began mixing powders and bits of herbs into a cup. “My lord looks very intent.”

Waxillium tapped the table. “My lord is annoyed. Broadsheets make for *terrible* research opportunities. I need to know what was in the first shipment.”

“The first shipment, my lord?”

“The first railcar that the thieves stole from.”

“Miss Grimes would note that you seem to be slipping into old habits, my lord.”

“Miss Grimes isn’t here, fortunately. Besides, Lord Harms and his daughter seemed *aghast* that I didn’t know about the robberies. I must keep abreast of events in the city.”

“That’s a very excellent excuse, my lord.”

“Thank you,” Waxillium said, taking the cup of tea. “I almost have myself completely persuaded.” He took a sip. “Preservation’s Wings, man! This is *good*.”

“Thank you, my lord.” Tillaume took out the napkin and snapped it in his hands, then folded it down the middle and laid it across the arm of Waxillium’s chair. “And I *believe* that the first thing stolen was a shipment of wool. I heard it being discussed at the butcher’s earlier in the week.”

“Wool. That makes no sense.”

“None of these crimes make much sense, my lord.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “Unfortunately, those are the most interesting kind of crimes.” He took another sip of the tea. The strong, minty scent seemed to clear his nose and mind. “I need paper.”

“What—”

“A large sheet,” Waxillium continued. “As big as you can find.”

“I will see what is available, my lord,” Tillaume said. Waxillium caught a faint sigh of exasperation from the man, though he left the room to do as asked.

How long had it been since Waxillium had started his research? He glanced at the clock, and was surprised at the time. Well into the night already.

Well, he was into it now. He’d never sleep until he’d worked it through. He rose and began to pace, holding his teacup and saucer before him. He stayed away from the windows. He was backlit, and would make an excellent target for a sniper outside. Not that he really thought there *would* be one, but … well, he felt more comfortable working this way.

Wool, he thought. He walked over and opened a ledger, looking up some figures. He grew so absorbed that he didn’t notice the passing of time until Tillaume returned.

“Will this do, my lord?” he asked, bringing in an artist’s easel with a large pad of paper clipped to it. “The old Lord Ladrian kept this for your sister. She did love to draw.”

Waxillium looked at it, and felt his heart clench. He hadn’t thought of Telsin in ages. They had been so distant most of their lives. Not by intent, like his distance from his uncle; Waxillium and the previous Lord Ladrian had often been at odds. No, his distance from Telsin had been one born more of laziness. Twenty years apart, only seeing his sister occasionally, had let him slide along without much contact.

And then she’d died, in the same accident as his uncle. He wished the news had been harder for him to hear. It *should* have been harder for him to hear. She’d been a stranger by then, though.

“My lord?” the butler asked.

“The paper is perfect,” Waxillium said, rising and fetching a pencil. “Thank you. I was worried we’d have to hang the paper on the wall.”

“Hang it?”

“Yes. I used to use some bits of tar.”

That idea seemed to make Tillaume *very* uncomfortable. Waxillium ignored him, walking over and beginning to write on the pad. “This is nice paper.”

“I’m pleased, my lord,” Tillaume said uncertainly.

Waxillium drew a little train in the top left corner, putting in a track ahead of it. He wrote a date beneath it. “First robbery. Fourteenth of Vinuarch. Target: wool. Supposedly.” In like manner, he added more trains, tracks, dates, and details down the paper.

Wayne had always mocked him when he’d sketched out crimes to help him think. But it worked, though he frequently had to put up with Wayne’s playful additions of little stick-figure bandits or mistwraiths rampaging across the otherwise neat and orderly sketchwork and notes.

“Second robbery happened much later,” Waxillium continued. “Metals. For the first robbery, Lord Tekiel didn’t make any kind of fuss until months had passed.” He tapped the paper, then crossed out the word “wool.” “He didn’t lose a shipment of wool. It was early summer then, and wool prices would be too low to justify the freight charges. As I recall, the rates were unusually high in Vinuarch because the eighteenth railway line was out of service. It would take a man with breadcrumbs for brains to pay a premium to ship out-of-season wares to people who didn’t want them.”

“So…” Tillaume said.

“Just a moment,” Waxillium said. He walked over and pulled a few ledgers off the shelf beside his desk. His uncle had some shipping manifests here.…

Yes. The old Lord Ladrian had kept *very* good track of what his competitor houses had been shipping. Waxillium scanned the lists for oddities. It took him a little while, but he eventually came up with a theory.

“Aluminum,” Waxillium said. “Tekiel was probably shipping aluminum, but avoiding taxes by claiming it as something else. In here, his stated aluminum shipments for the last two years are much smaller than they were for previous years. His smelters are still producing, however. I’d bet my best gun that Augustin Tekiel—with the help of some railway workers—has been running a nice, profitable little smuggling operation. That’s why he didn’t make a big commotion about the theft at first; he didn’t want to draw attention.”

Waxillium walked over and wrote some notations on his paper. He lifted his cup of tea to his lips, nodding to himself. “That also explains the long wait between the first and second robberies. The bandits were making use of that aluminum. They probably sold some of it on the black market to fund their operation, then used the rest to make aluminum bullets. But why would they *need* aluminum bullets?"

"For killing Allomancers?" Tillaume asked. He had been tidying the room while Waxillium read the ledgers.

"Yes." Waxillium drew in images of faces above three of the robberies, the ones where they'd taken hostages.

"My lord?" Tillaume asked, stepping up beside him. "You think the captives are Allomancers?"

"The names have all been released," Waxillium said. "All four are women from wealthy families, but none of them openly have Allomantic powers."

Tillaume remained quiet. That didn't mean everything. Many Allomancers among the upper crust were discreet about their powers. There were plenty of situations where that could be useful. For instance, if you were a Rioter or Soother—capable of influencing people's emotions—you wouldn't want people to suspect.

In other cases, Allomancy was flaunted. A recent candidate for the orchard-growers seat on the Senate had run solely on the platform that he was a Coppercloud, and was therefore impossible to affect with zinc or brass. The candidate won by a landslide. People hated thinking that someone might secretly be pulling their leaders' strings.

Waxillium started noting his speculations around the margins of the paper. Motives, possible ways they were emptying the freight cars so quickly, similarities and differences among the heists. As he wrote he hesitated, then added a couple of stick-figure bandits at the top, drawn in Wayne's sloppy style. Crazy though it was, he felt better having them there.

"I'll bet the captives were all Allomancers, secretly," Waxillium said. "The thieves had aluminum bullets to deal with Coinshots, Lurchers, and Thugs. And if we were able to catch any of the thieves, I'll bet good money that we'd find them wearing aluminum linings in their hats to shield their emotions from being Pushed or Pulled on." That wasn't uncommon among the city's elite as well, though the common men couldn't afford such luxury.

The robberies *weren't* about money; they were about the captives. That was why no bounty had been demanded, and why the bodies of the captives hadn't been discovered dumped somewhere. The robberies were meant to obscure the true motives for the kidnappings. The victims were not the spur-of-the-moment hostages they were meant to appear. The Vanishers were gathering Allomancers. And Allomantic metals—so far raw steel, pewter, iron, zinc, brass, tin, and even some bendalloy had been stolen.

“This is dangerous,” Waxillium whispered. “Very dangerous.”

“My lord…” Tillaume said. “Weren’t you going to go over the house account ledgers?”

“Yes,” Waxillium said distractedly.

“And the lease for the new offices in the Ironspine?”

“I can still get to that tonight too.”

“My lord. When?”

Waxillium paused, then checked his pocket watch. Again, he was surprised to see how much time had passed.

“My lord,” Tillaume said. “Did I ever tell you about your uncle’s horse-racing days?”

“Uncle Edwarn was a gambler?”

“Indeed he was. It was a great problem to the house, soon after his rise to high lord. He would spend most of his days at the tracks.”

“No wonder we’re destitute.”

“Actually, he was quite *good* at the gambling, my lord. He usually came out ahead. Far ahead.”

“Oh.”

“He stopped anyway,” Tillaume said, collecting his tray and Waxillium’s empty teacup. “Unfortunately, my lord, while he was winning a small fortune at the races, the house lost a *large* fortune in mismanaged business and financial dealings.” He walked toward the door, but turned. His normally somber face softened. “It is not my place to lecture, my lord. Once one becomes a man, he can and must make his own decisions. But I do offer warning. Even a good thing can become destructive if taken to excess.

“Your house *needs* you. Thousands of families rely upon you. They need your leadership and your guidance. You did not ask for this, I understand. But the mark of a great man is one who knows when to set aside the important things in order to accomplish the vital ones.”

The butler left, closing the door behind him.

Waxillium stood alone beneath the uncannily steady glow of the electric lights, looking at his diagram. He tossed the pencil aside, suddenly feeling drained, and fished out his pocket watch. It was two fifteen. He should be getting some sleep. Normal people slept at these hours.

He dimmed the lights to not be backlit, then walked to the window. He was still depressed not to see any mists, even though he hadn't expected them. *I never said daily prayers,* he realized. *Things have been too chaotic today.*

Well, it was better to arrive late than not at all. He reached into his pocket, fishing out his earring. It was a simple thing, stamped on the head with the ten interlocking rings of the Path. He slipped it into his ear, which was pierced for the purpose, and leaned against the window to stare out at the darkened city.

There was no specific prescribed posture for praying as a Pathian. Just fifteen minutes of meditation and pondering. Some liked to sit with legs crossed, eyes closed, but Waxillium had always found it *harder* to think in that posture. It made his back hurt and his spine tingle. What if someone sneaked around behind him and shot him in the back?

So, he just stood. And pondered. *How are things up there in the mists?* he thought. He was never sure how to talk to Harmony. *Life's good, I assume? What with you being God, and all?*

In response, he felt a sense of … amusement. He could never tell if he created those sensations himself or not.

Well, since I'm not God myself, Waxillium thought, *perhaps you could use that omniscience of yours to drum up some answers for me. It feels like I'm in a bind.*

A discordant thought. This wasn't like most of the binds he'd been in. He wasn't tied up, about to be murdered. He wasn't lost in the Roughs, without water or food, trying to find his way back to civilization. He was standing in a lavish mansion, and while his family was having financial troubles, it was nothing they couldn't weather. He had a life of luxury and a seat on the city Senate.

Why, then, did he feel like these last six months had been among the hardest he'd ever lived? An endless series of reports, ledgers, dinner parties, and business deals.

The butler was right; many *did* rely on him. The Ladrian house had started as several thousand individuals following the Origin, and had grown large in three hundred years, adopting under its protection any who came to work on its properties or in its foundries. The deals Waxillium negotiated determined their wages, their privileges, their lifestyle. If his house collapsed, they'd find employment elsewhere, but would be considered lesser members of those houses for a generation or two until they obtained full rights.

I've done hard things before, he thought. *I can do this one. If it's right. Is it right?*

Steris had called the Path a simple religion. Perhaps it was. There was only one basic tenet: Do more good than harm. There were other aspects—the belief that all truth was important, the requirement to give more than one took. There were over three hundred examples listed in the Words of Founding, religions that could have been. Might have been. In other times, in another world.

The Path was to study them, learn from their moral codes. A few rules were central. Do not seek lust without commitment. See the strengths in all flaws. Pray and meditate fifteen minutes a day. And don't waste time worshipping Harmony. Doing good *was* the worship.

Waxillium had been converted to the Path soon after leaving Elendel. He was still convinced that the woman he'd met on that train ride must have been one of the Faceless Immortals, the hands of Harmony. She'd given him his earring; every Pathian wore one while praying.

The problem was, it was hard for Waxillium to feel like he was doing anything useful. Luncheons and ledgers, contracts and negotiations. He knew, logically, that all of it was important. But those, even his vote on the Senate, were all abstractions. No match for seeing a murderer jailed or a kidnapped child rescued. In his youth, he'd lived in the City—the world's center of culture, science, and progress—for two decades, but he hadn't found himself until he'd left it and wandered the dusty, infertile lands out beyond the mountains.

Use your talents, something seemed to whisper inside of him. *You'll figure it out.*

That made him smile ruefully. He couldn't help wondering why, if Harmony really *was* listening, he didn't give more specific answers. Often, all Waxillium got from prayer was a sense of encouragement. Keep going. It's not as difficult as you feel it is. Don't give up.

He sighed, just closing his eyes, losing himself in thought. Other religions had their ceremonies and their meetings. Not the Pathians. In a way, its very simplicity made the Path much harder to follow. It left interpretation up to one's own conscience.

After meditating for a time, he couldn't help feeling that Harmony wanted him to study the Vanishers *and* to be a good house lord. Were the two mutually exclusive? Tillaume thought they were.

Waxillium glanced back at the stack of broadsheets and the easel with the drawing pad on it. He reached into his pocket, taking out the bullet Wayne had left.

And against his will, he saw in his mind's eye Lessie, head jerking back, blood spraying into the air. Blood covering her beautiful brown hair. Blood on the floor, on the walls, on the murderer who had been standing behind her. But that murderer hadn't been the one to shoot her.

Oh, Harmony, he thought, raising a hand to his head and slowly sitting down, back to the wall. *It really is about her, isn't it? I can't do that again. Not again.*

He dropped the round, pulled off his earring. He stood, walked over, cleaned up the broadsheets, and closed the drawing pad. Nobody had been hurt by the Vanishers yet. They were robbing people, but they weren't harming them. There wasn't even proof that the hostages were in danger. Likely they'd be returned after ransom demands were met.

Waxillium sat down to work on his house's ledgers instead. He let them draw his attention well into the night.

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“Harmony’s forearms,” Waxillium mumbled, stepping into the grand ballroom. “This is what passes for a modest wedding dinner these days? There are more people in here than live in entire *towns* in the Roughs.”

Waxillium had visited the Yomen mansion once in his youth, but that time, the grand ballroom had been empty. Now it was filled. Rows and rows of tables lined the hardwood floor of the cavernous chamber; there had to be over a hundred of them. Ladies, lords, elected officials, and the wealthy elite moved and chatted in a low hum, all dressed in their finest. Sparkling jewels. Crisp black suits with colorful cravats. Women with dresses after the modern fashion: deep colors, skirts that went down to the floor, thick outer layers with lots of folds and lace. Most women wore tight, vestlike coats over the top, and the necklines were much lower now than he remembered them being in his childhood. Perhaps he was simply more likely to notice.

“What was that, Waxillium?” Steris asked, turning to the side and letting him help off her overcoat. She wore a fine red dress that seemed calculatedly designed to be completely in fashion but not too daring.

“I was simply noting the size of this gathering, my dear,” Waxillium said, folding her coat and handing it—along with his bowler hat—to a waiting attendant. “I’ve been to quite a number of functions since my return to the city, and none were this enormous. Practically half the city seems to have been invited.”

“Well, this is something special,” she said. “A wedding involving two very well-connected houses. They wouldn’t want to leave anyone out. Except, of course, the ones they left out on purpose.”

Steris held out her arm for him to take. He’d received a detailed lecture during the carriage ride on how, precisely, he was to hold it. His arm above hers, taking her hand lightly, fingers wrapping down under her palm. It looked horribly unnatural, but she insisted that it would convey the exact meaning they intended. Indeed, as they stepped down onto the ballroom floor, they drew a number of interested looks.

“You imply,” Waxillium said, “that one purpose of this wedding dinner is not in who is invited, but who is *not*.”

“Precisely,” she said. “And, in order to fulfill that purpose, *everybody* else must be invited. The Yomens are powerful, even if they do believe in Sliverism. Horrid religion. Imagine, revering Ironeyes himself. Anyway, nobody will ignore an invitation to this celebration. And so, those to be slighted will not only find themselves without a party to attend, but unable to arrange their own diversions, as anyone they might have wanted to invite will be here. That leaves them to either associate with other uninviteds—therefore reinforcing their outcast status—or to sit alone at home, thinking about how they have been insulted.”

“In my experience,” Waxillium said, “that sort of unhappy brooding leads to a high probability of people getting shot.”

She smiled, waving with calculated fondness to someone they passed. “This isn’t the Roughs, Waxillium. It is the City. We don’t do such things here.”

“No, you don’t. Shooting people would be too charitable for City folks.”

“You haven’t even seen the worst of it,” she noted, waving to someone else. “You see that person turned away from us? The stocky man with the longer hair?”

“Yes.”

“Lord Shewrman. An infamously dreadful party guest. He’s a complete bore when not drunk and a complete buffoon when he is drunk—which is most of the time, I might add. He is probably the least likable person in all of upper society. Most people here would rather spend an hour amputating one of their own *toes* than spend a few moments chatting with him.”

“So why is he here?”

“For the insult factor, Waxillium. Those who were snubbed will be even more aghast to learn that Shewrman was here. By including a few bad alloys like him—men and women who are utterly undesirable, but who don’t realize it—House Yomen is essentially saying, ‘We’d even prefer spending time with *these* people to spending it with you.’ Very effective. Very nasty.”

Waxillium snorted. “If you tried something that rude out in Weathering, it would end with you strung up by your heels from the rafters. If you’re lucky.”

“Hum. Yes.” A servant stepped forward, gesturing for them to follow as she led them to a table. “You understand,” Steris continued more softly, “that I am no longer responding to your ‘ignorant frontiersman’ act, Waxillium.”

“Act?”

“Yes,” she said distractedly. “You are a man. The prospect of marriage makes men uncomfortable, and they clutch for freedom. Therefore, you have begun regressing, tossing out savage comments to provoke a reaction from me. This is your instinct for masculine independence; an exaggeration meant, unconsciously, to undermine the wedding.”

“You assume it’s an exaggeration, Steris,” Waxillium said as they approached the table. “Maybe this is what I am.”

“You are what you choose to be, Waxillium,” she said. “As for these people here, and choices made by House Yomen, I did not make these rules. Nor do I approve of them; many are inconvenient. But it is the society in which we live. Therefore, I make of myself something that can survive in this environment.”

Waxillium frowned as she released his arm and fondly kissed cheeks with a few women from a nearby table—distant relatives, it seemed. He found himself clasping hands behind his back and nodding with a civil smile to those who came to greet Steris and him.

He’d made a good showing for himself these last months while moving among upper society, and people treated him far more amiably than they once had. He was even fond of some of those who approached. However, the nature of what he was doing with Steris still made him uncomfortable, and he found it difficult to enjoy much of the conversation.

In addition, this many people in one place still made his back itch. Too much confusion, too difficult to watch the exits. He preferred the smaller parties, or at least the ones spread across a large number of rooms.

The bride and groom arrived, and people rose to clap. Lord Joshin and Lady Mi’chelle; Waxillium didn’t know them, though he did wonder why they were speaking with a scruffy man who looked like a beggar, dressed all in black. Fortunately, it didn’t seem Steris intended to drag him over to wait with those intent upon congratulating the newlyweds at the earliest possible moment.

Soon, the first tables were served their meals. Silverware began to clatter. Steris sent for a servant to prepare their table; Waxillium passed the time by inspecting the room. There were two balconies, one at each shorter end of the rectangular ballroom. There appeared to be space for dining up there, though no tables had been set up. They were being used for musicians today, a group of harpists.

Majestic chandeliers hung from the ceiling—six enormous ones down the center, outfitted with thousands of sparkling pieces of crystal. Twelve smaller ones hung at their sides. *Electric lights,* he noted. *Those chandeliers must have been a horrible pain to light before the conversion.*

The sheer cost of a party like this numbed his senses. He could have fed Weathering for a year on what was being spent for this single evening. His uncle had sold the Ladrian ballroom a few years back—it had been a separate building, in a different neighborhood from the mansion. That made Waxillium happy; from what he remembered, it had been as large as this one. If they'd still owned it, people might have expected him to throw lavish parties like this.

"Well?" Steris asked, holding out her arm for him again as the servant returned to lead them to their table. He could see Lord Harms and Steris's cousin Marasi sitting at the table already.

"I'm remembering why I left the City," Waxillium said honestly. "Life is so damn *hard* here."

"Many would say that of the Roughs."

"And few of them have lived in both," Waxillium said. "Living here is a different kind of hard, but it's still hard. Marasi is joining us again?"

"Indeed."

"What *is* going on with her, Steris?"

"She's from the Outer Estates and badly wanted the chance to attend university here in the City. My father took pity on her, as her own parents haven't the means to support her. He is allowing her to reside with us for the duration of her studies."

A valid explanation, though it seemed to roll out of Steris's mouth far too quickly. Was it a practiced excuse, or was Waxillium assuming too much? Either way, further discussion was interrupted as Lord Harms rose to greet his daughter.

Waxillium shook hands with Lord Harms, took Marasi’s hand and bowed, then sat. Steris began speaking with her father about the people she’d noted to be attending or absent, and Waxillium rested elbows on the table, listening with half an ear.

Hard room to defend, he thought absently. *Snipers on those balconies would work, but you’d need some on each one, watching to make sure nobody gets beneath the other.* Anyone with a strong enough gun—or the right Allomantic powers—could take out snipers from below. The pillars below the balconies would also be good shelter, though.

The more cover there was, the better the situation for the one who was outnumbered. Not that you ever wanted to be outnumbered, but he’d rarely been in any fight where he wasn’t. So he looked for cover. In the open, a gunfight came down to who could field the most men with weapons. But once you could hide, skill and experience started to compensate. Maybe this room wouldn’t be too bad a place to fight after all. He—

He hesitated. What was he doing? He’d *made* his decision. Did he have to keep remaking it every few days?

“Marasi,” he said, forcing himself into conversation. “Your cousin tells me you’ve entered into university studies?”

“I’m in my final year,” she said.

He waited for a further reply, and didn’t get one.

“And how go your studies?”

“Well,” she said, and looked down, holding her napkin.

That was productive, he thought with a sigh. Fortunately, it looked like a server was approaching. The lean man began pouring wine for them. “The soup will be along presently,” he explained with a faint Terris accent, lofty vowels, and a slightly nasal tone.

The voice froze Waxillium stiff.

“Today’s soup,” the server continued, “is a delightfully seasoned prawn bisque with a hint of pepper. You shall find it quite enjoyable, I think.” He glanced at Waxillium, eyes twinkling in amusement. Though he wore a false nose and a wig, those were Wayne’s eyes.

Waxillium groaned softly.

“My lord doesn’t like prawns?” Wayne asked with horror.

“The bisque is quite good,” Lord Harms said. “I’ve had it at a Yomen party before.”

"It's not the soup," Waxillium said. "I've just recalled something I forgot to do." *It involves strangling someone.*

"I shall return shortly with your soup, my lords and ladies," Wayne promised. He even had a fake line of Terris earrings in his ears. Of course, Wayne *was* part Terris, as was Waxillium himself—as evidenced by their Feruchemical abilities. That was rare in the population; though nearly a fifth of the Originators had been Terris, they weren't prone to marrying other ethnicities.

"Does that server look familiar?" Marasi asked, turning and watching him go.

"He must have served us last time we were here," Lord Harms said.

"But I wasn't with you last—"

"Lord Harms," Waxillium jumped in, "has anything been heard of your relative? The one who was kidnapped by the Vanishers?"

"No," he said, taking a sip of his wine. "Ruin those thieves. This kind of thing is *absolutely* unacceptable. They should confine such behavior to the Roughs!"

"Yes," Steris said, "it does somewhat undermine one's respect for the constabulary when things like this occur. And the robbery *inside* the city! How terrible."

"What was it like?" Marasi suddenly asked. "Lord Ladrian? Living where there was no law?" She seemed genuinely curious, though her comment earned a glare from Lord Harms, likely for bringing up Waxillium's past.

"It was difficult sometimes," Waxillium admitted. "Out there, some people just believe they can take what they want. It would actually *surprise* them when someone stood up to them. As if I were some spoiler, the only one who didn't understand the game they were all playing."

"Game?" Lord Harms said, frowning.

"A figure of speech, Lord Harms," Waxillium said. "You see, they all seemed to think that if you were skilled or well armed, you could take whatever you want. I was both, and yet instead of taking, I *stopped* them. They found it baffling."

"It was very brave of you," Marasi said.

He shrugged. "It wasn't bravery, honestly. I just kind of fell into things."

"Even stopping the Surefires?"

"They were a special case. I—" He froze. "How did you know about *that*?"

"Reports trickle in," Marasi said, blushing. "From the Roughs. Most of them get written up by someone. You can find them at the university or at the right bookshop."

"Oh." Uncomfortable, he picked up his cup and drank some wine.

As he did, something slipped into his mouth. He nearly spat out the entire mouthful in surprise. He contained himself. Barely.

Wayne, I really am *going to throttle you.* He moved the object into his hand, covering the act with a cough.

"Well," Steris said, "hopefully the constables will soon deal with these ruffians and we can return to peace and law."

"Actually," Marasi said, "I don't think that's likely."

"Child," Lord Harms said sternly. "That's quite enough."

"I'd like to hear what she has to say, my lord," Waxillium said. "For the sake of conversation."

"Well … all right … I suppose."

"It's simply a theory I had," Marasi said, blushing. "Lord Ladrian, when you were lawkeeper in Weathering, what was the population of the city?"

He fingered the item in his hand. A spent bullet casing that had been capped with a dab of wax. "Well, it started to grow rapidly in the last few years. But for most of the time, I'd say it was around fifteen hundred."

"And the surrounding area?" she asked. "All the places you'd patrol, but didn't have their own lawkeepers?"

"Maybe three thousand total," Waxillium said. "Depending. There are a lot of transients out in the Roughs. People looking to find a mineral claim or to start up a farmstead. Workers moving from place to place."

"Let's say three thousand," Marasi said. "And how many of you were there? Those who helped you keep the law?"

"Five or six, depending," he said. "Wayne and I, and Barl most of the time. A few others on and off."

And Lessie, he thought.

"Let's say six per three thousand," she said. "Gives us an easy number to work with. One lawman per five hundred people."

"What is the point of this?" Lord Harms asked sufferingly.

"The population of our octant is around six hundred thousand," she explained. "By the same ratio Lord Ladrian described, we should have roughly twelve hundred constables. But we don't. It's somewhere closer to six hundred, last I looked over the numbers. So, Lord Ladrian, your 'savage' wildlands actually had *double* the number of lawmen watching over it as we have here in the city."

"Huh," he said. *Odd information for a young woman of means to have.*

"I'm not trying to diminish your accomplishments," she said quickly. "You more likely had a higher percentage of lawbreakers as well, since the reputation of the Roughs draws that type. But I think it's a matter of perception. As you said, out of the city, people expect to get away with their crimes.

"Here, they are more circumspect—and many of the crimes are smaller in scope. Instead of the bank getting robbed, you get a dozen people being robbed on their way home at night. The nature of the urban environment makes it easier to hide if you keep your crimes below a certain level of visibility. But I wouldn't say life is really *safer* in the city, despite what people think.

"I'll bet more people are murdered here, by percentage of the population, than out in the Roughs. There is so much more going on in the City, however, that people pay less attention to it. By contrast, when a man is murdered in a small town, it's a very disruptive event—even if it's the only murder that's happened in years.

"And all of this isn't even counting the fact that much of the wealth in the world is concentrated in a few places inside the city. Wealth draws men looking for opportunity. There are a whole *host* of reasons why the City is more dangerous than the Roughs. It's just that we pretend that it isn't."

Waxillium folded his arms in front of him on the table. *Curious.* Once she started talking, she didn't seem shy at all.

"You see, my lord," Harms said. "This is why I tried to still her."

"It would have been a shame if you had," Waxillium said, "as I believe that's the most interesting thing anyone has said to me since I returned to Elendel."

Marasi smiled, though Steris just rolled her eyes. Wayne returned with the soup. Unfortunately, the area right around them was crowded—Wayne wouldn't be able to create a speed bubble around just Waxillium and himself. It would catch someone else, and anyone caught in it would have time sped up for them as well. Wayne couldn't shape the bubble or choose whom it affected.

While the others were distracted by the soup, Waxillium broke the wax off the sealed shell casing and found a small rolled-up piece of paper inside. He glanced at Wayne, then unrolled it.

You were right, it read.

"I usually am," he muttered as Wayne placed a bowl in front of him. "What are you up to, Wayne?"

"One seventy, thank you," Wayne said under his breath. "I've been lifting weights and eating steak."

Waxillium gave him a flat stare, but got ignored as Wayne proceeded to explain—with his slight Terris accent—that he'd soon return with a bread basket and more wine for the group.

"Lord Ladrian," Steris said as they began eating, "I suggest that we begin compiling a list of conversational topics we can employ when in the company of others. The topics should not touch on politics or religion, yet should be memorable and give us opportunities to appear charming. Do you know any particularly witty sayings or stories that can be our starting point?"

"I once shot the tail off a dog by mistake," Waxillium said idly. "It's kind of a funny story."

"Shooting dogs is hardly appropriate dinner conversation," Steris said.

"I know. Particularly since I was aiming for its balls."

Marasi just about spat her soup across the table.

"Lord Ladrian!" Steris exclaimed, though her father seemed amused.

"I thought you said I couldn't shock you any longer," he said to Steris. "I was merely testing your hypothesis, my dear."

"Honestly. You *will* eventually overcome this rural lack of decorum, won't you?"

He stirred his soup to make sure Wayne hadn't hidden anything in it. *I hope he at least washed that bullet casing.* "I suspect that I will, indeed, eventually overcome it," he said, raising the spoon to his lips. The soup was good, but too cold. "The amusing thing is that when I was in the Roughs, I was considered to be highly refined—so much so, in fact, that they thought me haughty."

"Calling a man 'refined' by Roughs standards," Lord Harms said, raising a finger, "is like saying a brick is 'soft' by building-material standards—right before you smash it into a man's face."

“Father!” Steris said. She glared at Waxillium, as if the comment were his fault.

“It was a perfectly legitimate simile,” Lord Harms said.

“We will have no further talk of hitting people with bricks or of shootings, *regardless* of the target!”

“Very well, cousin,” Marasi said. “Lord Ladrian, I once heard that you threw a man’s own knife at him and hit him right through the eye. Is the story true?”

“It was actually Wayne’s knife,” Waxillium said. He hesitated. “And the eye was an accident. I was aiming for the balls that time too.”

“Lord Ladrian!” Steris said, nearly livid.

“I know. That’s quite off target. I’ve got *really* bad aim with throwing knives.”

Steris looked at them, growing red as she saw that her father was snickering, but trying to cover it up with his napkin. Marasi met her gaze with innocent equanimity. “No bricks,” Marasi said, “and no guns. I was making conversation as you requested.”

Steris stood. “I’m going to see myself to the women’s washroom while you three compose yourselves.”

She stalked away, and Waxillium felt a stab of guilt. Steris was stiff, but she seemed earnest and honest. She did not deserve mockery. It was very hard not to try provoking her, however.

Lord Harms cleared his throat. “That was uncalled for, child,” he said to Marasi. “You must not make me regret my promise to start bringing you to these functions.”

“Don’t blame her, my lord,” Waxillium said. “I was the primary offender. I’ll offer a suitable apology to Steris when she returns, and will guard my tongue for the rest of the evening. I shouldn’t have allowed myself to go so far.”

Harms nodded, sighing. “I’ll admit, I’ve been tempted to such lengths myself a time or two. She’s much as her mother was.” He gave Waxillium a pitying look.

“I see.”

“This is our lot, son,” Lord Harms said, standing. “To be lord of a house requires certain sacrifices. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I see Lord Alernath over at the bar and I think I’ll grab a nip of something harder with him before the main course. If I don’t go before Steris gets back, she’ll bully me into staying. I shouldn't be long." He nodded to the two of them, then waddled toward a group of higher-built tables off to the side, next to an open bar.

Waxillium watched him go, idly thinking and rolling Wayne's note in his fingers. Previously, he'd assumed Lord Harms had driven Steris to be as she was, but it appeared he was more under *her* thumb than vice versa. *Another curiosity,* he thought.

"Thank you for your defense of me, Lord Ladrian," Marasi said. "It appears that you are as quick to come to a lady's aid with words as you are with pistols."

"I was merely stating the truth as I saw it, my lady."

"Tell me. Did you really shoot off a dog's tail when aiming for his … er…"

"Yes," Waxillium said, grimacing. "In my defense, the damn thing was attacking me. Belonged to a man I hunted down. The aggressiveness wasn't the dog's fault; the poor thing looked like it hadn't been fed in days. I was trying to shoot it somewhere nonlethal, scare it off. That part about the man I hit in the eye was fabricated, though. I wasn't actually aiming for any body part in particular—I was just hoping I'd hit."

She smiled. "Might I ask you something?"

"Please."

"You looked crestfallen when I spoke of the statistics dealing with lawman ratios. I didn't mean to offend or downplay your heroics."

"It's all right," he said.

"But?"

He shook his head. "I'm not sure if I can explain it. When I found my way out to the Roughs, when I started bringing in the warranted, I started to … Well, I thought I'd found a place where I was needed. I thought I'd found a way to do something that nobody else would do."

"But you did."

"And yet," he said, stirring his soup, "it appears that all along, the place I left behind might have needed me even more. I'd never noticed."

"You did important work, Lord Ladrian. *Vital* work. Besides, I understand that before you arrived, nobody was upholding the law in that area."

"There was Arbitan," he said, smiling, remembering the older man. "And, of course, the lawkeepers over in Far Dorest."

"A distant city and with a short reach," she said, "which had a single capable lawman to serve a large population. Jon Deadfinger had his own problems. By the time you had built things up, Weathering was protected better than those in the City—but it did not start that way."

He nodded, though—again—he was curious about how much she knew. Were people *really* telling stories about him and Wayne all the way over here in the city? Why hadn't he heard of them before now?

Her statistics *did* bother him. He hadn't thought of the City as dangerous. It was the Roughs, wild and untamed, that needed rescuing. The City was the land of plenty that Harmony had created to shelter mankind. Here, trees grew fruit in abundance and cultivated lands had water without need for irrigation. The ground was always fertile, and somehow never got farmed out.

This land was supposed to be different. Protected. He'd put away his guns in part because he'd convinced himself that the constables could do their jobs without help. *But don't the Vanishers prove that might not be the case?*

Wayne returned with the bread and a bottle of wine, then stopped, looking at the two empty seats. "Oh dear," he said. "Did you grow so tired of waiting that you *devoured* your two companions?"

Marasi glanced at him and smiled.

She knows, Waxillium realized. *She recognizes him.*

"If I may note something, my lady," Waxillium said, drawing her attention back. "You are far less unassuming than you were at our first meeting."

She winced. "I'm not very good at being shy, am I?"

"I wasn't aware it was something that required practice."

"I try all the time," Wayne said, sitting down at the table and taking the baguette out of his basket. He took a healthy bite. "Nobody gives me any credit for it. 'S because I'm misunderstood, I tell you." His Terris accent had vanished.

Marasi looked confused. "Should I pretend to be aghast at what he's doing?" she asked Waxillium in a hushed tone.

"He saw that you'd recognized him," Waxillium said. "Now he's going to sulk."

"Sulk?" Wayne started eating Steris's soup. "That's right unkind, Wax. *Ugh.* This stuff is far worse than I was telling you guys. Sorry 'bout that."

"It will reflect in my tip," Waxillium said dryly. "Lady Marasi, I was serious in my inquiry. To be frank, it seems that you've been trying to act with exaggerated timidity."

"Always looking down after you speak," Wayne agreed. "Raising the pitch of your tone a little too much with questions."

"Not the type to be studying at the university at her own request," Waxillium noted. "Why the act?"

"I'd rather not say."

"You'd rather not," Waxillium said, "or Lord Harms and his daughter would rather you not?"

She blushed. "The latter. But please. I would really prefer to leave the topic."

"Ever charming, Wax," Wayne said, taking another bite from the loaf of bread. "See that? You've pushed the lady almost to tears."

"I'm not—" Marasi began.

"Ignore him," Waxillium said. "Trust me. He's like a rash. The more you scratch him, the more irritating he gets."

"Ouch," Wayne said, though he grinned.

"Aren't you worried?" Marasi asked softly of Wayne. "You're wearing a waiter's uniform. If they see you sitting at the table and eating…"

"Oh, that's a good point," Wayne said, tipping his chair back. The person behind him had left, and with Lord Harms gone, Wayne had just enough room to—

—and there it was. He leaned his chair forward again, clothing changed back to a duster with a loose button-down shirt and thick Roughs trousers underneath. He spun his hat on his finger. The earrings were gone.

Marasi jumped. "Speed bubble," she whispered, sounding awed. "I thought I'd be able to see something from outside!"

"You could, if you were watching closely," Waxillium said. "A blur. If you look at the next table over, the sleeve of his waiter's coat is sticking out from where he tossed it. His hat folds—though the sides are stiff, you can compress it between your hands. I'm still trying to figure out where he had the duster."

"Under your table," Wayne said, sounding very self-satisfied.

"Ah, of course," Waxillium said. "He had to know beforehand which table would be ours so he could be assigned as our waiter." *I really should have looked under the table before we sat,* Waxillium thought. *Would that* *have seemed too paranoid?* He didn’t feel paranoid; he didn’t lie awake at nights, worried that he’d be shot, or think that conspiracies were trying to destroy him. He just liked to be careful.

Marasi was still looking at Wayne; she seemed bemused.

“We aren’t what you expected,” Waxillium said. “From the reports you read?”

“No,” she admitted. “The accounts usually omitted matters of personality.”

“There are stories ’bout us?” Wayne asked.

“Yes. Many.”

“Damn.” He sounded impressed. “Do we get royalties for them or something? If we do, I want Wax’s share, seeing as to how I did all the stuff they say he did. Plus he’s already rich and all.”

“They are news-style reports,” Marasi said. “Those don’t pay royalties to their subjects.”

“Filthy cheats.” Wayne paused. “I wonder if any of the other fine ladies in this establishment have heard of my outrageously heroic and masculine exploits.…”

“Lady Marasi is a student at the university,” Waxillium said. “I’m assuming she read reports that are collected there. Most of the public won’t be familiar with them.”

“That is true,” she said.

“Oh,” Wayne said, sounding disappointed. “Well, maybe Lady Marasi herself might be interested in hearing more of my outrageously—”

“Wayne?”

“Yes.”

“Enough.”

“Right.”

“I do apologize for him,” Waxillium said, turning to Marasi. She still wore the bemused expression on her face.

“He does that a lot,” Wayne said. “Apologizing. I think it’s one of his personal failings. I try to help him out by being damn near perfect, but so far, that hasn’t been enough.”

“It’s quite all right,” she said. “I do wonder if I should write something for my professors describing how … unique it was to meet you two.”

“What is it, exactly, that you are studying at the university?” Waxillium asked.

She hesitated, then blushed deeply.

“Ah, see!” Wayne said. “Now, *that’s* how to act shy. You’re getting much better! Bravo.”

“It’s just that…” She raised a hand to shade her eyes and looked down in embarrassment. “It’s just … Oh, all right. I’m studying legal justice and criminal behavioristics.”

“That’s something to be ashamed of?” Waxillium said, sharing a confused look with Wayne.

“Well, I’ve been told it’s not very feminine,” she said. “But beyond that … well, I’m sitting with you two … and … well, you know … you’re two of the most famous lawkeepers in the world, and all…”

“Trust me,” Waxillium said. “We don’t know as much as you might think.”

“Now, if you were studying buffoonery and idiotic behavior,” Wayne added, “*that* is something we’re experts on.”

“That’s two things,” Waxillium said.

“Don’t care.” Wayne continued eating the bread. “So where *are* the other two? I’m assuming you didn’t really devour them. Wax only eats people on the weekend.”

“Both will likely be returning soon, Wayne,” Waxillium said. “So if you had a purpose to your visit, you may wish to be on with it. Unless this is just normal, run-of-the-mill tormenting.”

“I told you what it was about,” Wayne said. “You didn’t accidentally eat my note, did you?”

“No. It didn’t say much.”

“It said enough,” Wayne said, leaning in. “Wax, you told me to look at the hostages. You were right.”

“They’re all Allomancers,” Waxillium guessed.

“More than that,” Wayne said. “They’re all relatives.”

“It’s only been three hundred years since the Originators, Wayne. We’re *all* relatives.”

“Does that mean you’ll take responsibility for me?”

“No.”

Wayne chuckled, pulling a folded piece of paper from his duster pocket. “It’s more than that, Wax. Look. Each of the women kidnapped was from a particular line. I did some *researchin’*. Real, serious stuff.” He paused. “Why do they call it *re*search if I’ve only done it this one time?”

"Because I'll bet you had to look things up twice," Waxillium said, taking the paper and studying it. It was written awkwardly, but was decipherable. It explained the basic lines of descent of each of the women kidnapped.

Several things stood out. Each of them could trace back to the Lord Mistborn himself. Because of that, most of them *also* had a strong heritage of Allomancy in their past. They were all fairly closely related, third or fourth cousins, some first.

Waxillium looked up, and noticed Marasi smiling broadly, regarding him and Wayne.

"What?" Waxillium asked.

"I *knew* it!" she exclaimed. "I knew you were in town to investigate the Vanishers. You showed up to become house lord only one month after the first robbery happened. You're going to catch them, aren't you?"

"Is *that* why you insisted that Lord Harms bring you to meetings with me?"

"Maybe."

"Marasi," Waxillium said, sighing. "You're jumping to conclusions. Do you think the deaths in my family, making me house lord, were fabrications?"

"Well, no," she said. "But I was surprised that you'd accepted the title until I realized that you probably saw it as a chance to find out what is going on with these robberies. You have to admit, they *are* unusual."

"So is Wayne," Waxillium said. "But I wouldn't uproot myself, change my entire lifestyle, and accept responsibility for an entire house just to study him."

"Look, Wax," Wayne jumped in—ignoring the barb, which was unusual for him. "Please tell me you brought a gun with you."

"What? No, I didn't." Waxillium folded up the paper and handed it back. "Why would you care?"

"Because," Wayne said, snatching the paper from his hand and leaning in. "Don't you see? The thieves are looking for places they can rob where the wealthy upper class of Elendel can be found—because *among* those wealthy upper-class types, they find their targets. People with the right heritage. Those types, rich types, have stopped traveling on the railway."

Waxillium nodded. "Yes, if the women really *are* the true targets, the high-profile robberies will make potential future targets much less likely to travel. A valid connection. That must be why the thieves attacked the theater.”

“And where else are there wealthy individuals with the right heritage?” Wayne asked. “A place where people wear their finest jewelry, which will let you rob them as a distraction? A place where you can find the right hostage to take as the real prize?”

Waxillium’s mouth grew dry. “A large wedding reception.”

The doors at both ends of the ballroom suddenly burst open.

5

The bandits didn’t look like the kind Waxillium was used to. They didn’t mask their faces with kerchiefs or wear dusters and wide-brimmed Roughs hats. Most of them wore vests and bowler-style city hats, dull trousers, and loose, buttoned shirts that were rolled to the elbows. They weren’t *better* dressed, really, just different.

They were well armed. Rifles held at shoulders for many, pistols in the hands of others. People throughout the ballroom noticed immediately, silverware clanking and curses sounding. There were at least two dozen bandits, perhaps three. Waxillium noticed with dissatisfaction that some more were coming in from the right, through the doors to the kitchens. They would have left men behind to watch the staff and keep them from running for help.

“Hell of a time to leave your guns,” Wayne said. He moved off his seat and crouched beside the table, slipping his twin hardwood dueling canes out from underneath.

“Put those down,” Waxillium said softly, counting. Thirty-five men he could see. Most were congregated at the two ends of the rectangular ballroom, directly in front of and behind Waxillium. He was in almost the very center of the room.

“What?” Wayne said sharply.

“Put the canes down, Wayne.”

“You can’t mean—”

“Look at this room!” Waxillium hissed. “How many bystanders are there in here? Three hundred, four? What will happen if we provoke a firefight?”

“You could protect them,” Wayne said. “Push them out of the way.”

“Maybe,” Waxillium said. “It would be very risky. So far, none of these robberies have turned violent. I won’t have you turning this one into a bloodbath.”

“I don’t have to listen to you,” Wayne said sullenly. “You’re not in charge of me anymore, Wax.”

Waxillium met his eyes and held them as the room filled with cries of alarm and concern. Looking reluctant, Wayne slid back up into his seat. He didn’t put down the dueling canes, but he did keep his hands under the tablecloth, hiding them from view.

Marasi had turned, watching the thieves begin to move through the room, her eyes wide and her rose lips parted. “Oh my.” She spun around, digging out her pocketbook with trembling fingers. She whipped out a small notepad and a pencil.

“What are you doing?” Waxillium asked.

“Writing down descriptions,” she said, her hand shaking. “Did you know that, statistically, only one out of two witnesses can accurately describe a criminal who assaulted them? Worse, seven out of ten will pick the wrong man out of a lineup if a similar but more threatening man is presented. In the moment, you are far more likely to overestimate the height of an assailant, and you will often describe him as being similar to a villain from a story you’ve recently heard. It’s vital, if you are witnessing a crime, to pay special attention to the details of those involved. Oh, I’m babbling, aren’t I?”

She looked terrified, but she started writing anyway, jotting down descriptions of every criminal.

“We never needed to do stuff like that,” Wayne said, eyeing the thieves as they leveled guns at the partygoers, silencing them. “Seein’ as to how if we witness a crime, the guys doing it are usually dead by the end.” He shot Waxillium a glare.

Several thieves began forcing cooks and servers out of the kitchens to join the guests. “If you please!” one of the robbers bellowed, shouldering a shotgun. “Sit down! Remain calm! And *be quiet*.” He had a faint Roughs accent and a solid—though not tall—build, with bulging forearms and a mottled, grayish complexion, almost as if his face were made of granite.

Koloss blood, Waxillium thought. *Dangerous.*

People quieted save for a few whimperings from the overtaxed. The bride’s mother appeared to have fainted, and the wedding party was hunkered down, the groom looking angry, with a protective arm over his new wife.

A second Vanisher stepped forward. This one, in contrast to the others, wore a mask: a knit cloth covering his face, with a Roughs hat atop it. “That’s better,” he said in a firm, controlled voice. Something about that voice struck Waxillium.

“If you’re sensible, we’ll be done with this in a matter of moments,” the masked Vanisher said calmingly, walking amid the tables as about a dozen of the bandits began to fan through the room, opening large sacks. “All we want is your jewelry. Nobody needs to get hurt. It would be a shame to spoil such a fine party as this with bloodshed. Your jewelry isn’t worth your life.”

Waxillium glanced toward Lord Harms, who was still sitting by the bar. He’d begun patting his face with a handkerchief. The men with the sacks quickly fanned out through the room, stopping at each table and gathering necklaces, rings, earrings, pocketbooks, and watches. Sometimes the items were tossed in readily, sometimes reluctantly.

“Wax…” Wayne said, voice strained.

Marasi continued writing, pen and paper down in her lap.

“We need to get through this alive,” Waxillium said softly. “Without anyone getting hurt. Then we can give our reports to the constables.”

“But—”

“I will *not* be the cause of these people dying, Wayne,” Waxillium snapped, voice much louder than he’d intended.

Blood on the bricks. A body in a leather coat, slumping to the ground. A grinning face, dying with a bullet in the forehead. Winning, even as he died.

Not again. Never again.

Waxillium squeezed his eyes closed.

Never again.

“How *dare* you!” a voice suddenly yelled. Waxillium glanced to the side. A man at a nearby table had stood up, shaking off the hand of the stout woman beside him. He had a thick, graying beard and wore a suit of an older cut, tails in the back reaching all the way down to his ankles. “I will *not* stay quiet, Marthin! I am a constable of the Eighth Guard!”

This drew the attention of the bandit leader. The masked man strolled toward the outspoken man, shotgun resting easily on his shoulder. “Ah,” he said, “Lord Peterus, I believe it is.” He waved to a pair of bandits, and they rushed forward, weapons trained on Peterus. “Retired chief of the Eighth constabulary. We’ll be needing you to give up your weapon.”

“How dare you commit a robbery here, at a wedding celebration,” Peterus said. “This is *outrageous*! You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Ashamed?” the bandit leader said as his minions patted down Peterus and pulled a pistol—Granger model 28, optional thick grip—out of his shoulder holster. “*Ashamed?* To rob these? After what you people have done to the Roughs all these years? This isn’t shameful. This here, this is *payback*.”

There is *something about that voice,* Waxillium thought, tapping the table. *Something familiar. Quiet down, Peterus. Don’t provoke them!*

“In the name of the law, I will see you hunted down and hanged for this!” Peterus cried.

The outlaw leader smacked Peterus across the face, knocking him to the ground. “What know your sort of the law?” the bandit leader growled. “And be careful about warning people you’re going to see them executed. That gives them less reason to hold back. Rust and *Ruin,* you people sicken me.”

He waved for his lackeys to resume gathering riches. The bride’s mother had recovered, and was sobbing as her family was shaken down for its cash, including even the bridal necklace.

“The bandits really *are* interested in the money,” Waxillium said softly. “See? They make each person at the table speak, to find jewelry hidden in mouths. Notice how they make each one stand up and then do a quick check of their pockets and around their seats.”

“Of course they’re interested in the money,” Marasi whispered back. “That’s the expected motive for robbery, after all.”

“It’s the hostages too, though,” Waxillium said. “I’m sure of it.” Originally, he’d assumed the robberies were just a cover for the bandits’ real purpose. If that were the case, however, they wouldn’t be so thorough about the money. “Hand me your notebook.”

She glanced at him.

“Now,” he said, sprinkling steel dust into his wine, then reaching under the table. She hesitantly handed over the notebook as a bandit walked toward their table. It was the gray-skinned one with the thick neck.

“Wayne,” Waxillium said, “bat on the wall.”

Wayne nodded curtly, sliding over his dueling canes. Waxillium drank his wine, and pressed the spiral-bound notebook and the dueling canes against his side of their square table. He slipped a small metal rod from his sleeve and pressed it against the canes, then burned steel.

Lines sprang up around him. One pointed toward the rod, and another to the notebook's wire coil. He lightly Pushed against them, then let go. The canes and the notebook remained pressed against the table's side, obscured by the tablecloth, which draped down over them. He had to be careful not to Push too hard, lest he move the table.

The bandit came to their table, proffering his sack. Marasi was forced to take off her small pearl necklace, the only jewelry she was wearing. With shaking hands, she searched in her pocketbook for any bills, but the bandit just snatched the entire thing and dumped it into his sack.

"Please," Waxillium said, making his voice shake. "Please, don't hurt us!" He pulled out his pocket watch, then dumped it to the table, as if in haste. He yanked its chain free of his vest and threw it in the sack. Then he got out his pocketbook and tossed it in, conspicuously pulling out both of his pockets with shaking hands to show he had nothing else. He began patting his coat pockets.

"That'll do, mate," the koloss-blooded man said, grinning.

"Don't hurt me!"

"Sit back down, you rusting git," the bandit said, looking back at Marasi. He leered, then patted her down, making her speak so he could check her mouth. She bore it with a deep blush, particularly when the patting down turned into a few solid gropes.

Waxillium felt his eye begin to twitch.

"Nothing else," the bandit said with a grunt. "Why'd I get the poor tables? And you?" He glanced at Wayne. Behind them, another of the bandits found Wayne's servant's coat under the table, holding it up with a confused expression.

"Do I *look* like I've got anything of value, mate?" Wayne asked, dressed in his duster and Roughs trousers. He'd turned up his Roughs accent. "I'm just 'ere by mistake. Was begging in the kitchen when I heard you blokes come in."

The bandit grunted, but patted Wayne's pockets anyway. He found nothing, then checked under the table and made them all stand up. Finally he swore at them for being "too poor" and snatched Wayne's hat off his head. He threw away his own hat—he was wearing a knit cap underneath, aluminum peeking through the holes—then walked off, sticking Wayne's hat on his head over the cap.

They sat back down.

“He took my lucky hat, Wax,” Wayne growled.

“Steady,” Waxillium said, handing Marasi back her notebook so she could return to taking covert notes.

“Why didn’t you hide your pocketbook,” she whispered, “as you did the notebook?”

“Some of the bills in it are marked,” Waxillium said distractedly, watching the masked leader. He was consulting something in his hand. Looked like a couple of crinkled-up sheets of paper. “That’ll allow the constables to track where they get spent, if they do get spent.”

“Marked!” Marasi said. “So you *did* know we’d be robbed!”

“What? Of course I didn’t.”

“But—”

“Wax always carries some marked bills,” Wayne said, eyes narrowing as he noticed what the leader was doing. “Just in case.”

“Oh. That’s … very unusual.”

“Wax is his own special brand of paranoid, miss,” Wayne said. “Is that bloke doing what I think he’s doing?”

“Yes,” Waxillium said.

“What?” Marasi asked.

“Comparing faces to drawings in his hand,” Waxillium said. “He’s looking for the right person to take as a hostage. Look how he’s strolling through the tables, checking every woman’s face. He’s got a few others doing it too.”

They fell silent as the leader strolled past them. He was accompanied by a fine-featured fellow with a scowl on his face. “I’m tellin’ you,” the second man said, “the boys are gettin’ jumpy. You can’t give ’em all this and never let ’em fire the bloody things.”

The masked leader was silent, studying everyone at Wax’s table for a moment. He hesitated briefly, then moved on.

“You’re gonna have to let the boys loose sooner or later, boss,” the second man said, his voice trailing off. “I think…” They were soon too far for Waxillium to make out what they were saying.

Nearby, Peterus—the former constable—had gotten back up into his seat. His wife was holding a napkin to his bleeding head.

This is *the best way,* Waxillium told himself firmly. *I’ve seen their faces. I’ll be able to track down who they are when they spend my money. I’ll find them, and fight them on my own terms. I’ll …*

But he wouldn't. He'd let the constables do that part, wouldn't he? Wasn't that what he kept telling himself?

A sudden disturbance from the far side of the chamber drew his eyes. A few bandits led a couple of frazzled-looking women into the hall, one of them Steris. It looked like they'd finally thought to sweep the ladies' room. The other bandits were making pretty good time gathering goods. There were enough of them that it didn't take too long, even with this large crowd.

"All right," the boss called out. "Grab a hostage."

Too loud, Waxillium thought.

"Who should we take?" one of the bandits yelled back.

They're making a show of it.

"I don't care," the boss said.

He wants us to think he's picking one at random.

"Any of them will do," the boss continued. "Say … that one." He waved at Steris.

Steris. One of the previous abductees was her cousin. Of course. She was in the same line.

Waxillium's eye twitching grew worse.

"Actually," the boss said. "We'll take two this time." He sent his koloss-blooded lackey running back toward the tables of people. "Now, nobody follow, or they'll get hurt. Remember, a few jewels aren't worth your life. We'll cut the hostages loose once we're sure we aren't being followed."

Lies, Waxillium thought. *What do you want with them? Why are you—*

The koloss-blooded man who had stolen Wayne's hat stepped up to Wax's table and grabbed Marasi by the shoulder. "You'll do," he said. "You're coming for a ride with us, pretty."

She jumped as he touched her, dropping her notepad.

"Here now," another bandit said. "What's this?" He picked it up, looking through it. "All it's got is words, Tarson."

"Idiot," the koloss-blooded man—Tarson—said. "You can't read, can you?" He craned over. "Here, now. That's a description of *me*, isn't it?"

"I…" Marasi said. "I just wanted to remember, for my journal, you see. …"

"I'm sure," Tarson said, tucking the notebook into a pocket. His hand came out with a pistol, which he lowered at her head.

Marasi grew pale.

Waxillium stood up, steel burning in his stomach. The other bandit's pistol was trained at his head a second later.

"Your lady will be just fine with us, old boy," Tarson said with a smile on his grayish lips. "Up you go." He pulled Marasi to her feet, then pushed her before him toward the northern exit.

Waxillium stared down the barrel of the other bandit's pistol. With a mental Push, he could send that gun with a snap back into its owner's face, perhaps break his nose.

The bandit looked like he wanted to pull the trigger. He looked eager, excited by the thrill of the robbery. Waxillium had seen men like that before. They were dangerous.

The bandit hesitated, then glanced at his friends, and finally broke off, jogging toward the exit. Another was shoving Steris toward the door.

"Wax!" Wayne hissed.

How could a man of honor watch something like this? Every instinct of justice Waxillium had *demanded* he do something. Fight.

"Wax," Wayne said softly. "Mistakes happen. Lessie wasn't your fault."

"I…"

Wayne grabbed his dueling canes. "Well, *I'm* going to do something."

"It's not worth the cost of lives, Wayne," Waxillium said, shaking out of his stupor. "This isn't just about me. It's true, Wayne. We—"

"How *dare* you!" a familiar voice bellowed. Lord Peterus, the former constable. The aging man removed the napkin from his head, stumbling to his feet. "Cowards! *I* will be your hostage, if you require one."

The bandits ignored him, most jogging toward the exits of the room, waving their guns about and enjoying making the dinnergoers cringe.

"Cowards!" Peterus yelled. "You are *dogs*, each and every one of you. I'll see you hanged! Take me instead of one of those girls, or it will happen. I swear it by the Survivor himself!" He stumbled after the retreating boss, passing lords, ladies, and the wealthy—most of whom had gotten down and were hiding under their tables.

There goes the only man in this room with any courage, Waxillium thought, suddenly feeling a powerful shame. *Him and Wayne.*

Steris was almost to the door. Marasi and her captor were catching up to the boss.

I can't let this happen. I—

"COWARD!"

The masked bandit leader suddenly spun, hand snapping out, a gunshot cracking the air, echoing across the large ballroom. It was over in a heartbeat.

The aged Peterus collapsed in a heap. Smoke curled in the air over the bandit boss's pistol.

"Oh…" Wayne said softly. "You just made a bad mistake, mate. A *very* bad mistake."

The boss turned away from the body, holstering his gun. "Fine," he yelled, walking toward the door. "You can have some fun, boys. Burn it out of your blood quickly and meet me outside. Let's—"

Everything froze. People stopped in place. The curling smoke hung motionless. Voices quieted. Whimpering halted. In a circle around Waxillium's table, the air rippled just faintly.

Wayne stood up, shouldering his dueling canes, inspecting the room. He was placing each and every one of the bandits, Waxillium knew. Judging distances, preparing himself.

"As soon as I drop the bubble," Wayne said, "this place is going to erupt like an ammunition store in a volcano."

Waxillium calmly reached into his jacket and slid a hidden pistol from beneath his arm. He set it on the table. His twitch had vanished.

"Well?" Wayne asked.

"That's a terrible metaphor. How would an ammunition store get into a volcano?"

"I don't know. Look, are you going to fight or not?"

"I've tried waiting," Waxillium said. "I gave them a chance to leave. I *tried* giving this up."

"You gave it a good show, Wax." He grimaced. "Too good a show."

Waxillium rested his hand on the pistol. Then he picked it up. "So be it." With his other hand, he poured out his entire pouch of steel into his wine cup, then downed it.

Wayne grinned. "You owe me a pint for lying to me, by the way."

"Lying?"

"You said you hadn't brought a gun."

"I didn't bring *a* gun," Waxillium said, reaching to the small of his back and sliding a second pistol out. "You know me better than that, Wayne. I never go anywhere with only one. How much bendalloy do you have?"

"Not as much as I'd like. The stuff's damn expensive here in town. I've got maybe enough for five minutes' extra time. My metalminds are pretty much full, though. Spent a good two weeks sick in bed after you left." That would give Wayne some healing power, should he get shot.

Waxillium took a deep breath; the coldness inside him melted away and became a flame as he burned steel that pinpointed each and every source of metal in the room.

If he froze again …

I won't, he told himself. *I cannot.* "I'll get the girls. You keep the bandits on the south side off me. Our priority is to keep the bystanders alive."

"Gladly."

"Thirty-seven armed baddies, Wayne. In a room full of innocents. This is going to be *tough*. Stay focused. I'll try to clear some space as we start. You can catch a ride, if you want."

"Perfect as Preserves," Wayne said, turning and putting his back to Waxillium's. "You wanna know why I *really* came to find you?"

"Why?"

"I thought of you happy in a comfy bed, resting and relaxing, spending the rest of your life sipping tea and reading papers while people bring you food and maids rub your toes and stuff."

"And?"

"And I just couldn't leave you to a fate like that." Wayne shivered. "I'm too good a friend to let a mate of mine die in such a terrible situation."

"Comfortable?"

"No," Wayne said. "*Boring.*" He shivered again.

Waxillium smiled, then raised thumbs to hammers and cocked his pistols. When he'd been young and sought the Roughs, he'd ended up going where he'd been needed. Well, maybe that had happened again.

"Go!" he yelled, leveling his guns.

6

Wayne dropped the speed bubble.

First step, Waxillium thought as he took aim, *draw their attention.* He began gently Pushing away from himself in the way that created a steel bubble of force to interfere with bullets. It wouldn’t protect him completely, but it would help. Unless they fired aluminum bullets.

Best to be careful. And best to shoot first.

The robbers were eagerly raising their weapons. He could see the lust for destruction in their eyes. They had been armed to the teeth, but so far, their robberies had occurred without a single shot being fired.

Rather than kill a lot of people, most of them probably just wanted to shoot the place up a little, but such situations easily grew more violent than expected. If they weren’t stopped, the Vanishers would leave behind more than shattered windows and broken tables.

Waxillium quickly chose a bandit with a shotgun and dropped him with a bullet to the head. A second followed. Those shotguns were least dangerous to Waxillium, but they’d be deadly to the cowering bystanders.

His shots boomed in the cavernous chamber and the guests screamed. Some took the chance to run for the edges of the room. Most got down beside their tables. In the confusion, the bandits didn’t spot Waxillium at first.

He dropped another man with a bullet to the shoulder. The smart thing to do from here would have been to crouch down beside a table and continue to fire. It would take the bandits precious moments to discover who was attacking them in a room so large and crowded.

Unfortunately, the men behind him opened fire, whooping in delight. They hadn’t noticed what he was doing, though the men in front of him on the other side of the hall had seen their friends fall and were scattering for cover. In moments, the room would be a storm of lead and gunsmoke.

Taking a deep breath, Waxillium flared his steel and tapped his iron metalmind. Filling it made him lighter, but tapping it made him heavier—much heavier. He increased his weight a hundredfold. There was a proportional increase in the strength of his body, or so he'd guessed, as he didn't crush himself with his own weight.

He raised his guns high over his head to keep them out of the radius, then Pushed outward from himself in a ring. He started carefully, gradually increasing its strength. When you Pushed, it was your weight against that of the object—in this case, the metal screws and bolts in the tables and chairs. They were swept away from him.

He became the epicenter of an expanding ring of force. Tables toppled, chairs scraped against the floor, and people screamed in surprise. Some were caught up in it, shoved away from him. Not so hard that they were hurt, he hoped, but it was better to suffer a few bruises than remain in the center of the room with what was coming.

Just to the side, he saw Wayne—who had been moving carefully toward the back of the room—leap up onto an overturned table, holding to its rim and grinning as he rode it in a rush toward the bandits back there.

Waxillium eased off on the Push. He stood alone in a large empty space at the center of the dining hall, surrounded by patches of spilled wine, food, and fallen dishes.

Then the firing started in earnest, the bandits in front of him letting loose with a barrage. He met the onslaught of bullets with another strong Push. The bullets stopped in the air, rebuffed in a wave. Given their speed, he could stop bullets that way only if he was expecting them.

He let the bullets fly back at their owners, but didn't Push too hard, lest he strike an innocent partygoer. It was enough to send the bandits scrambling, however, and yelling that there was a Coinshot in the room.

He was in real danger now. Quick as an eyeblink, Waxillium switched from tapping his metalmind to filling it, making himself far lighter. He pointed his revolver down and shot a bullet into the floor just behind himself and Pushed off it, launching into the air. Wind rushed in his ears as he threw himself over the barricade of furniture he'd made, where some of the guests still huddled. Luckily, many were realizing that the perimeters of the room would be much safer, and were scrambling that way.

Waxillium dropped right in the middle of the bandits, who had started taking cover behind the pile of tables and chairs. Men cursed as he spread his arms, guns pointed in opposite directions, and started firing. He spun, dropping four men with a quick spray of bullets.

Some bandits fired on him, but the bullets were off aim, and swerved away from his steel bubble. “Aluminum bullets!” one of the bandits was yelling. “Get out your bloody aluminum!”

Wax spun and fired two shots into that man’s chest. Then he leaped to the side, rolling up next to a table that had been beyond his initial Push. A quick Push against the nails in the top overturned it, giving him cover as the bandits opened fire. He caught blue lines from some of the bullets, moving too quickly for him to Push out of the way.

Other bandits were reloading their guns. He was in luck; it seemed from the curses of the bandit leaders that the men were supposed to have aluminum bullets loaded already, at least in some of the chambers. Shooting aluminum was like shooting gold, however, and many of the bandits appeared to have kept the aluminum in their pockets rather than wanting to have it in the guns, where they might end up firing it by accident.

A bandit ducked around the side of his table, aiming a pistol. Waxillium reacted by reflex, Pushing on the gun, slapping it back into his face. Waxillium dropped him with a bullet to the chest.

Empty, he thought to himself, counting the bullets he’d shot. He had just two left in the other gun. He glanced over the edge of his shelter, noting the locations of two reloading bandits who had hidden behind overturned tables. He took aim quickly, increased his weight, then fired and *Pushed* with everything he had on the bullet leaving his gun.

The bullet cracked in the air, driving forward into the table shelter and drilling right through it, hitting the bandit on the other side. Waxillium repeated, taking down the other bandit, who was stupefied to see the thick oak table penetrated by a simple revolver bullet. Then Waxillium threw himself over the top of his own table, getting to the other side just as the men behind him got around the wounded and started firing at him.

Bullets snapped against his shelter, but it held. This time, none of them gave off blue lines. Aluminum. He breathed deeply, dropping his revolvers and pulling out the Terringul 27 he had strapped to the inside of his calf. Not the largest-caliber gun, but its long barrel made it precise.

He spared a glance for Wayne, and counted four Vanishers down. His friend was gleefully leaping off a table toward a man with a shotgun. The two became a blur as Wayne activated a speed bubble. In an instant he was in a different place—bullets zipping through the area he'd left—hiding behind an overturned table, the bandit with the shotgun limp on the ground.

Wayne's favorite tactic was to get close, then catch one person in the speed bubble and fight them alone. He couldn't move the speed bubble after putting it up, but he could move around inside of it. So when he released the bubble after fighting his chosen foe one-on-one, he'd be standing in a different place than expected. Foes found him incredibly difficult to track and aim at.

But in a long fight, they'd eventually catch on and hold their fire until just after Wayne dropped a bubble. It took a couple of seconds between dropping one and putting up another, the time when Wayne was most vulnerable. Of course, even when the bubble was up, Wayne wasn't completely safe. It could be nerve-racking to know that his friend was fighting alone, enclosed by a bubble of accelerated time. If Wayne got into trouble while inside, Waxillium couldn't help. Wayne would be shot and bleeding before the bubble collapsed.

Well, Waxillium had his own troubles. With those aluminum bullets, his own protective bubble was useless. He let it drop. More bullets pelted his table and the floor around him, the pops of gunfire echoing in the grand hall. Fortunately, he could still see blue lines pointing to the ordinary steel of the bandits' guns, including those of a group of men attempting to flank him.

No time to deal with them, he thought. The bandit boss had sent Steris out with one of his men, but had paused by the door himself. He didn't seem surprised by the resistance. Something about the way he stood there, imperious and in control … Something about the way his eyes—the only visible part of his masked face—found Wax, and locked on to him … Something about that voice …

Miles? The thought was a shock.

Screams. Marasi's screams. Wax turned away from the bandit leader, feeling an unfamiliar sense of panic. Steris needed him, but Marasi did too, and she was closer. The koloss-blooded man named Tarson had her; he held her with one arm around the neck, towing her toward the door and cursing.

His two companions looked about anxiously, as if expecting constables to come pouring in at any moment.

Marasi had gone limp. Tarson was shouting, and he jammed his revolver in her ear, but she had her eyes squeezed shut and refused to respond. She knew she wasn’t some simple hostage; they wanted her specifically, and therefore wouldn’t shoot her.

Good girl, Waxillium thought. It couldn’t be easy, hearing the Vanisher shout, feeling the barrel on her temple. A few guests hid nearby, a well-dressed woman and her husband holding their hands to their ears and whimpering. The gunfire was loud, chaotic, though he barely noticed these things any longer. He should have slipped his earplugs in, regardless. Too late now.

Waxillium ducked to the side and fired two shots into the wooden floor to cause those flanking him to duck for cover. The Terringul was loaded with hollow-point bullets specifically designed to lodge in wood, giving him a good anchor when he needed one. They also happened to lodge in flesh, reducing the chances of a through-and-through shot that could injure bystanders, which suited him just fine.

He dashed forward in a crouch and leaped onto a large serving platter. He pressed one foot against the lip of the platter, and Pushed on the bullets behind him. The maneuver threw him forward in a skid across the polished wooden floor. He broke out of the tables into open space just before the steps out of the room, then kicked the platter out from under him and increased his weight, hitting the ground and stopping.

The platter flipped out in front of him, and the startled bandits began firing. Metal pinged against metal as some of the bullets hit the platter; Waxillium responded, dropping the men on either side of Tarson with two quick shots. Then he flared his steel and Pushed toward Tarson’s gun to try knocking it away from Marasi.

Only then did Waxillium realize there was no blue line pointing to the man’s gun. Tarson grinned, his ashy face topped by Wayne’s hat. Then he whipped around, placing himself behind Marasi, whom he gripped by the neck with one hand, holding the gun steady against her head with the other.

No blue lines. *Rust and Ruin … an entire* gun *made of aluminum?*

Waxillium and Tarson both fell still. The bandits behind hadn’t noticed Waxillium’s floor-level escape on the platter; they were closing on the area where he’d been hiding. The boss still stood in the doorway, looking toward

Waxillium. Wax *had* to be wrong about who he was. People could look alike, sound alike. That didn't mean …

Marasi whimpered. And Waxillium found himself unable to move, unable to raise his hand to fire. The shot he'd made to save Lessie played again and again in his mind.

I can make a shot like that, he thought to himself, angry. *I've done it a dozen times.*

He'd only missed once.

He couldn't move, couldn't think. He kept seeing her die again and again. Blood in the air, a smiling face.

Tarson apparently realized that Waxillium wouldn't fire. So he swung his gun away from Marasi's head and toward Waxillium.

Marasi went rigid. She locked her legs and slammed her head upward into the Vanisher's chin. Tarson's shot went wild and he stumbled backward, holding his mouth.

With Marasi mostly out of the way, Waxillium's mind cleared, and he found himself able to move again. He shot Tarson, though he couldn't bring himself to aim for the chest, not with Marasi stumbling nearby. He settled on dropping Tarson with a shot to the arm. Marasi raised her hand to her mouth in horror, watching him fall.

"He's over there!" Voices from behind, the three bandits he'd been fighting among the tables. An aluminum bullet split the air just beside him.

"Hold on," Waxillium said to Marasi, leaping forward and grabbing her around the waist. He raised his gun and shot the last bullet in his gun toward the doorway, hitting the masked leader of the Vanishers in the head.

The man collapsed in a heap.

Well, there goes that theory, Waxillium thought. Miles wouldn't have fallen to a mere bullet. He was a Twinborn of a particularly dangerous variety.

Tarson was rolling over, holding his arm and groaning. No time. Guns empty. Waxillium dropped the gun and Pushed on it while holding tightly to Marasi. The Push hurled the two of them into the air; a hail of bullets sprayed through the space where they'd been. Unfortunately, they missed Tarson, who was rolling on the floor.

Marasi cried out, clinging to him as they flew up toward the brilliant chandeliers. Waxillium pushed off one of them, causing it to rock back and forth. That Push threw him and Marasi toward the nearby balcony, which was occupied by a group of cowering musicians.

Waxillium landed hard on the balcony; he was off-balance from carrying Marasi, and hadn't had time to judge the Push precisely. They rolled in a bundle of red and white fabric. When they came to a rest, Marasi clung to him, shaking and gasping for breath.

He sat up, and held her for a moment. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," he said. "That was very brave, stopping the bandit as you did."

"Seven out of ten kidnappings can be foiled by appropriate resistance on the part of the target," she said, words tumbling out of her mouth. She squeezed her eyes closed again. "Sorry. That was just very, *very* unsettling."

"I—" He froze.

"What?" she asked, opening her eyes.

Waxillium didn't respond. He rolled to the side, pulling loose from her grip as he noticed the blue lines moving to the left. Someone was coming up the steps to the balcony.

Waxillium came up beside a large harp as the balcony door burst open to reveal two Vanishers—one with a rifle, the other with a pair of pistols. Waxillium increased his weight by tapping his metalmind, then heaved with a desperate flare of steel, Pushing against the harp's metal mountings, nails, and strings. The instrument crashed into the wooden doorway and smashed the men against the wall. They slumped down, dropping to the stairs under the broken harp.

Waxillium ran to check their vitals. Convinced they wouldn't be dangerous any time soon, he grabbed the handguns and dashed back to the edge of the balcony, scanning the room below. The furniture he'd Pushed out of the way made a strange perfectly circular open space on the ballroom floor. Partygoers were making for the kitchens in increasingly large numbers. He looked for Wayne, but saw only the broken bodies of fallen bandits where he'd been.

"Steris?" Marasi asked, crawling up beside him.

"I'll go after her right now," Waxillium said. "Some men towed her outside, but they won't have had time to…" He trailed off as he noticed a blur beside the far door. It stopped, and suddenly Wayne was lying on the ground, blood pooling around him. A bandit stood above him looking quite pleased with himself, holding a smoking pistol.

Damn! Waxillium thought, feeling a spike of fear. If Wayne had been hit in the head …

Steris or Wayne?

She'll be safe, he thought. *They took her for a reason; they need her.*

"Oh no!" Marasi said, pointing at Wayne. "Lord Ladrian, is that—"

"He'll be all right if I can get to him," Waxillium said, hastily shoving a pistol into Marasi's hands. "Can you use one of these?"

"I—"

"Just start firing it if someone threatens you. I'll come." He leaped up onto the balcony railing. His way was mostly blocked by the chandeliers; he couldn't make a direct jump to Wayne. He'd have to jump down, then up again, and bound to—

No time. Wayne was dying.

Go!

Waxillium threw himself off the balcony. As soon as his feet were free, he tapped his metalmind and drew forth as much weight as he could. That didn't tow him to the ground; an object fell at the same speed, no matter its weight. Only air resistance mattered.

However, weight did matter a great deal when Pushing—which Waxillium did, throwing everything he had against the chandeliers. They ripped apart in a line, the metal inside them twisting upon itself, crystal exploding outward in a shower. That gave him plenty of room along the upper portion of the room to jump in an arc toward Wayne.

In a heartbeat, Waxillium stopped tapping his metalmind and started filling it instead, decreasing his weight to almost nothing. He Pushed on the broken harp behind, and a simultaneous quick Push against the nails in the floor kept him high.

The result was that he soared across the room in a graceful arc, passing through the space the large chandeliers had occupied. The glittering smaller chandeliers continued to shine on either side of him while crystal showered beneath, each tiny piece splintering the light into a spray of colors. His suit coat flapped, and he lowered the single revolver in his hand as he fell, pointing it at the bandit standing over Wayne.

Waxillium emptied six chambers at the thief. He couldn't afford to take chances.

The pistol was slick in Waxillium's hand as he hit the ground, Pushing on the floor nails to keep from breaking his legs. The thief slumped back against the wall, dead.

Just as Waxillium reached Wayne, a speed bubble sprang up around them. Waxillium exhaled in relief as Wayne stirred; he knelt to turn his friend face upward. Wayne's shirt was soaked with blood, a bullet hole visible in his belly. As Waxillium watched, it slowly closed up, healing itself.

"Damn," Wayne said, groaning. "Gut wounds *hurt*."

Wayne couldn't have kept the bubble up while the bandit was alive—that would have told him Wayne wasn't dead. Outlaws and lawmen alike were accustomed to Metalborn; if the bubble had stayed up, the bandit would have quickly shot Wayne in the head.

So Wayne had been forced to drop the bubble and play dead. Luckily, the bandit hadn't turned him over to check his vitals and noticed that the wound was healing. Wayne was a Bloodmaker, a type of Feruchemist who could store health in the way that Waxillium stored weight. If Wayne spent some time being sickly and weak—his body healing itself much more slowly than normal—he could store up the health and healing ability in a metalmind. Then, when he tapped it, he healed at a greatly increased rate.

"How much do you have left in your metalmind?" Waxillium asked.

"That was the second bullet wound of the night," Wayne said. "I can maybe heal one more." Wayne stood as Waxillium pulled him to his feet. "Took me a good two weeks in bed to store up that much. Hope that girl of yours is worth it."

"Girl of *mine*?"

"Oh, c'mon, mate. Don't think I didn't see how you were looking at her during dinner. You always did like 'em smart." He grinned.

"Wayne," Waxillium said. "Lessie hasn't even been gone a year."

"You have to move on eventually."

"I'm done with this conversation," Waxillium said, looking over the nearby tables. Vanisher bodies lay strewn about, bones broken by Wayne's dueling canes. Waxillium spotted a few living ones hiding behind tables for cover, as if they hadn't realized yet that Wayne didn't carry guns.

"Five left?" Waxillium asked.

"Six," Wayne said, picking up and spinning his dueling canes. "There's another in the shadows over there. I brought down seven. You?"

"Sixteen, I think," Wax said distractedly. "Haven't been counting carefully."

"Sixteen? Damn, Wax. I was hoping you'd have rusted a bit, was thinkin' maybe I'd be able to catch you this time."

Waxillium smiled. "It's not a competition." He hesitated. "Even if I am winning. Some men got out the door with Steris. I shot the guy who took your hat, though he lived. He's probably gone by now."

"You didn't grab the hat for me?" Wayne asked, sounding offended.

"I was a *little* busy being shot at."

"Busy? Aw, mate. It doesn't take any effort at all to get shot at. I think you're just makin' excuses on account of being jealous of my lucky hat."

"That's it entirely," Waxillium said, fishing in his pocket. "How much time you have left?"

"Not much," Wayne said. "Bendalloy's almost gone. Maybe twenty seconds."

Waxillium took a deep breath. "I'm going for the three on the left. You go right. Get ready to jump."

"Got it."

"Go!"

Wayne ran forward and leaped onto a table in front of them. He dropped the speed bubble right as he launched himself off, and Waxillium braced himself by increasing his weight, then Pushed on Wayne's metalminds, sending the man soaring through the air in an arc toward the bandits. Once Wayne was airborne, Waxillium flipped from tapping his metalmind to filling it, then Pushed on some nails, launching himself into the air in a slightly different trajectory.

Wayne hit first, probably landing so hard he had to heal himself as he rolled between a pair of hiding bandits. He came up to his feet and slammed his dueling canes down on one bandit's arm. He then spun and smashed a cane into the second man's neck.

Waxillium tossed his gun as he fell, Pushing it hard into the face of a startled thief. He landed, then tossed the empty cartridge that Wayne had given him earlier—the one that had contained the message—at a second man. Pushing on it, he turned the casing into an improvised bullet, slamming it into the man's forehead and piercing his skull.

Waxillium shoved on the casing hard enough that it tossed him to the side. He plowed his shoulder into the chest of the man he'd thrown his gun at. The man stumbled back, and Waxillium slammed his forearm—and its metalmind bracer—into the man's head, dropping him.

One more, he thought. *Behind me to the right.* It was going to be close. Waxillium kicked the gun he'd dropped, intending to Push it toward the final bandit.

A gunshot sounded.

Waxillium froze, anticipating the pain of a bullet hitting him. Nothing happened. He spun to find the final bandit slumped over a table, bleeding, a gun dropping from his fingers.

What by the Survivor's scars…?

He looked up. Marasi knelt on the balcony where he'd left her. She'd fetched the rifle from the bandit he'd crushed, and she obviously knew how to use it. Even as he watched, she fired again, dropping the bandit in the shadows Wayne had mentioned.

Wayne stood up from finishing off his two assailants. He looked confused until Waxillium pointed toward Marasi.

"Wow," Wayne said, stepping up to him. "I'm liking her more and more. Definitely the one of the two *I'd* pick if I were you."

The one of the two.

Steris!

Waxillium cursed and leaped forward, throwing himself in a Steelpush across the room toward the other exit. He hit the ground running, noting with concern that the boss's body wasn't where he'd dropped it. There was blood in the entryway. Had they dragged him away?

Unless … Maybe his theory wasn't wrong after all. But *damn it,* he couldn't be facing Miles. Miles was a lawman. One of the best.

Waxillium burst out into the night—this ballroom exit led directly to the street. Some horses stood here tied to a fence, and what looked like a group of grooms lay gagged and bound on the ground.

Steris, and the bandits who had carried her out, were gone. He did find a large group of constables riding into the courtyard, however.

"Great timing, chaps," Waxillium said, sitting down on the steps, exhausted.

* * *

"I don't care *who* you are or how much money you have," Constable Brettin said. "This is a total mess you've created, sir."

Waxillium sat on his stool, listening with only half an ear as he rested with his back against the wall. He was going to ache in the morning. He hadn't pushed his body so hard in months. He was lucky he hadn't twisted anything or thrown out a muscle.

"This *isn't* the Roughs," Brettin continued. "You think you can do anything you want? You think you can just pick up a gun and take the law into your own hands?"

They sat in the kitchens of Yomen Manor, in a side area that the constables had partitioned off for interviews. It hadn't been long since the end of the fight. Just long enough for the trouble to begin.

Though his ears still rang from the noise of the gunfire, Waxillium could also hear moans and cries from the ballroom as the partygoers were seen to. Beyond that, he could hear the clopping of hooves and the racket of the occasional automobile out in the mansion courtyard as the city's elite fled in groups as they were released. The constables would be speaking to each person, making certain they were well and checking their names off the guest list.

"Well?" Brettin demanded. He was the constable-general, head of the constabulary in their octant. He was probably feeling *very* threatened by the robberies happening under his watch. Waxillium could imagine what it would be like in his position, getting thunder each day from powers above him who were not pleased.

"I'm sorry, constable," Waxillium said calmly. "Old habits make for strong steel. I should have restrained myself, but would you have done any different? Would you have watched women being kidnapped and done nothing?"

"I have a legal right and responsibility you do not."

"I have a moral right and responsibility, constable."

Brettin harrumphed, but the calm words mollified him somewhat. He glanced to the side as a brown-suited constable wearing one of their domelike hats entered and saluted.

"Well?" Brettin asked. "What's the news, Reddi?"

"Twenty-five dead, Captain," the man said.

Brettin groaned. "You see what you've caused, Ladrian? If you'd just kept your head down like everyone else, then those poor folks would still be alive. Ruination! This is a mess. I could *hang* for this—”

“Captain,” Reddi interrupted. He stepped in and spoke softly. “Excuse me, sir. But those were the *bandit* casualties. Twenty-five of them dead, sir. Six captured alive.”

“Oh. And how many civilians killed?”

“Just one, sir. Lord Peterus. He was shot before Lord Ladrian started fighting back. Sir.” Reddi was regarding Waxillium with a mixture of awe and respect.

Brettin glanced at Waxillium, then grabbed his lieutenant by the arm and towed him a little farther off. Waxillium closed his eyes, breathed softly, and caught some of the conversation.

“You mean … two men … thirty-one *by themselves*?”

“Yes, sir.”

“… else wounded…?”

“… broken bones … not too serious … bruises and scrapes … going to open fire…”

There was silence, and Waxillium opened his eyes to find the constable-general staring at him. Brettin waved Reddi away, then walked back.

“Well?” Waxillium asked.

“You appear to be a lucky man.”

“My friend and I drew their attention,” Waxillium said. “And most of the partygoers already had their heads down when the shooting began.”

“You still broke bones with your Allomantic stunt,” the constable-general said. “There will be bruised egos and angry lords. They’ll come to *me* when they complain.”

Waxillium said nothing.

Brettin crouched down before Waxillium, getting in close. “I know about you,” he said softly. “I knew eventually I’d be having this talk with you. So let me be clear. This is my city, and I have the authority here.”

“Is that so?” Waxillium asked, feeling very tired.

“It is.”

“So where were you when the bandits started shooting people in the head?”

Brettin’s face grew red, but Waxillium held his eyes.

“I’m not threatened by you,” Brettin said.

“Good. I haven’t said anything threatening yet.”

Brettin hissed softly, then pointed at Waxillium, tapping a finger against his chest. “Keep your tongue civil. I’ve half a mind to toss you into jail for the night.”

“Then do it. Maybe by morning you’ll have found the *other* half of your mind, and we’ll be able to have a reasonable conversation.”

Brettin’s face grew even redder, but he knew—as Waxillium did—that he wouldn’t dare throw a house lord into jail without significant justification. Brettin finally broke away, waving a dismissive hand at Waxillium and stalking out of the kitchen.

Waxillium sighed, standing up and taking his bowler off the counter where he’d left it. *Harmony protect us from small-minded men with too much power.* He donned the hat and walked out into the ballroom.

The room had been mostly cleared of guests, the wedding party itself taken in Lord Yomen’s carriage to a place where they could recover from the ordeal. The ballroom swarmed with an almost equal number of constables and physicians. The wounded were sitting on the raised wooden floor just before the exit; there looked to be about twenty or thirty people there. Waxillium noticed Lord Harms sitting at a table off to the side, staring down with a morose expression, Marasi trying to comfort him. Wayne was at the table too, looking bored.

Waxillium walked over to them, removing his hat, and sat down. He found that he didn’t exactly know what to say to Lord Harms.

“Hey,” Wayne whispered. “Here.” He handed Waxillium something under the table. A revolver.

Waxillium looked at him, confused. It wasn’t his.

“Figured you’d want one of these.”

“Aluminum?”

Wayne smiled, eyes twinkling. “Snatched it out of the collection the constables made. Apparently there were *ten* of these. Figured you could sell it. I spent a lot of bendalloy fighting these gits. Need some money to replace it. But don’t worry, I left a real nice drawing I did in the gun’s place when I took it. Here.”

He handed over something else. A handful of bullets. “Grabbed these too.”

“Wayne,” Waxillium said, fingering the long, narrow cartridges, “you realize these are rifle rounds?”

“So?”

“So they won’t fit a revolver.”

“They won’t? Why not?”

“Because.”

“Kind of a dumb way to make bullets, innit?” He seemed baffled. Of course, most things about guns baffled Wayne, who was generally better off throwing a gun at someone than trying to fire it at them.

Waxillium shook his head in amusement, but didn’t turn the gun down. He *had* wanted one. He slipped the revolver into one of his shoulder holsters and turned to Lord Harms.

“My lord,” Waxillium said. “I have failed you.”

Harms dabbed his face with his handkerchief, looking pale. “Why would they take her? They’ll let her go, won’t they? They said they would.”

Waxillium fell silent.

“They won’t,” Lord Harms said, looking up. “They haven’t let any of the others go, have they?”

“No,” Waxillium said.

“You *have* to get her back.” Harms took Waxillium’s hand. “I care nothing for the money or jewelry they took from me. It can be replaced, and most of it was insured anyway. But I’ll pay *any* price for Steris. Please. She is to be your fiancée! You have to find her!”

Waxillium looked into the older man’s eyes, and saw fear there. Whatever bravado this man had shown in earlier meetings, it was an act.

Funny, how quickly someone can stop calling you a miscreant and a rogue when they want your help, Waxillium thought. But if there was something he couldn’t ignore, it was a sincere request for help.

“I’ll find her,” Waxillium said. “I promise it, Lord Harms.”

Harms nodded. Then, he slowly pushed himself to his feet.

“Let me help you to the carriage, my lord,” Marasi said.

“No,” Harms said, waving her down. “No. Just let me … just let me go and sit by myself. I won’t leave without you, but please give me some time alone.” He walked away, leaving Marasi standing with her hands clasped.

She sat back down, looking sick. “He wishes it were she you had rescued and not me,” she said softly.

“So, Wax,” Wayne butted in. “Where did you say that bloke was who had my hat?”

“I told you that he got away after I shot him.”

“I was hoping he’d dropped my hat, you know. Getting shot makes people drop stuff.”

Waxillium sighed. “He still had it on when he left, I’m afraid.”

Wayne started cursing.

“Wayne,” Marasi said. “It’s only a hat.”

“Only a hat?” he asked, aghast.

“Wayne’s a little attached to that hat,” Waxillium said. “He thinks it’s lucky.”

“It *is* lucky. I ain’t never died while wearing that hat.”

Marasi frowned. “I … I’m not sure I know how to respond.”

“That’s a common reaction to Wayne,” Waxillium said. “I did want to thank you for your timely intervention, by the way. Do you mind if I ask where you learned to shoot like that?”

Marasi blushed. “Ladies’ target club at the university. We’re quite well ranked against other clubs in the city.” She grimaced. “I don’t suppose … either of those fellows I shot pulled through?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “You plugged them right good, you did. The one near me left brains all over the door!”

“Oh dear.” Marasi grew pale. “I never expected…”

“It’s what happens when you shoot someone,” Wayne pointed out. “At least, usually someone has the good sense to get dead when you go to all the trouble to shoot them. Unless you miss anything vital. That bloke what took my hat?”

“I hit him in the arm,” Waxillium said. “But it should have brought him down better than it did. He has koloss blood for sure. Might be a Pewterarm as well.”

That quieted Wayne. He was probably thinking the same thing as Waxillium—a band like this, with these numbers and such nice weapons, was likely to have at least a couple of Allomancers or Feruchemists among them.

“Marasi,” Waxillium said, as something occurred to him, “is Steris an Allomancer?”

“What? No. She isn’t.”

“You certain?” Waxillium asked. “She might have been hiding it.”

“She’s not an Allomancer,” Marasi said. “Nor a Feruchemist. I can promise it.”

“Well, there’s a theory rusted away,” Wayne said.

“I need to think,” Waxillium said, tapping the table with his fingernail. “Too much about these Vanishers doesn’t make sense.” He shook his head. “But, for now, I should bid you a good evening. I’m exhausted, and if I may be bold enough to say it, you look the same.”

“Yes, of course,” Marasi said.

They stood, walking toward the exit. The constables didn’t stop them, though some did shoot Waxillium hostile looks. Others seemed disbelieving. A few looked awed.

This night, like the four previous, lacked any mists. Waxillium and Wayne walked Marasi to her uncle’s carriage. Lord Harms sat inside, staring straight ahead.

As they arrived, Marasi took Waxillium’s arm. “You really should have gone for Steris first,” she said softly.

“You were closer. Logic dictated I save you first.”

“Well, whatever the reason,” she said, voice even more soft, “thank you for what you did. I just … Thank you.” She looked like she wanted to say more, staring up into his eyes, then went onto her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. Before he could react, she turned away and climbed into the carriage.

Wayne stepped up to him as the carriage moved off into the dark street, horses’ shoes clattering on the paving stones. “So,” Wayne said, “you’re going to marry her cousin?”

“Such is the plan.”

“Awkward.”

“She is an impulsive young woman half my age,” Waxillium said. *An apparently brilliant, beautiful, intriguing young woman who also happens to be an excellent shot.* Once, that combination would have left him completely smitten. Now, he barely gave it a passing thought.

He turned away from the carriage. “Where are you staying?”

“Not sure yet,” Wayne said. “I found this house where the folks who lives there is away, but I think they might be back tonight. Left ’em some bread as a thanks.”

Waxillium sighed. *I should have guessed.* “I’ll give you a room, assuming you promise not to steal too much.”

“What? I *never* steal, mate. Stealing’s bad.” He ran a hand through his hair and grinned. “Might need to trade you for a hat to wear till I get my other one back, though. Do you need any bread?”

Waxillium just shook his head, waving for his carriage to drive them back to Ladrian Mansion.

7

The morning after the assault on the wedding dinner, Marasi stood before the imposing mansion at Sixteen Ladrian Place, holding her handbag before her in both hands. She always liked to grip something before herself when she was nervous, a bad habit. As Professor Modicarm said, “Obvious visual tells must be assiduously avoided by a practitioner of the law, lest he inadvertently give criminals an insight into his emotional state.”

Thinking over quotes from her professors was another of her nervous habits. She continued to stand on the stone-paved sidewalk, indecisive. Would Lord Waxillium find it odd or invasive of her to come? Did he think her a silly girl with a silly hobby who foolishly assumed she could be of use to a seasoned lawman?

She should probably just go up and knock. But didn’t she have a right to be nervous when confronting a man such as Waxillium Ladrian? A living legend, one of her personal heroes?

A young gentleman passed on the sidewalk behind her, walking an eager dog. He tipped his hat to her, though he spared a brief distrustful glance for Ladrian Mansion.

The building didn’t seem to deserve such scrutiny; the venerable structure was built of stately, vine-bedecked stone, with large windows and an old iron gate. Three mature apple trees spread limbs over the front garden, and a member of the grounds staff was lazily sawing off a few dead branches. City law established by the Lord Mistborn himself required that even ornamental trees provide food.

What would it be like to visit the Roughs, she thought idly, *where the trees are scraggly and short?* The Roughs must be a fascinating place. Plants here in the Elendel Basin grew bountifully with little need for care or cultivation. A final gift of the Survivor, his munificent touch upon the land.

Stop fidgeting, she told herself. *Be firm. Control your surroundings.* That was something Professor Aramine had said just last week, and—

Damn it! She strode forward, through the open gate, up the steps, and to the door. She slammed the knocker down on the door three times.

A long-faced butler answered. He looked her up and down with dispassionate eyes. “Lady Colms.”

“I was hoping I might see Lord Ladrian?”

The butler raised an eyebrow, then swung the door open the rest of the way. He said nothing, but a lifetime growing up around servants such as him—servants trained after the ancient Terris ideal—had taught her to read his actions. He did not think she should be visiting Waxillium, and particularly not alone.

“The sitting room is currently unoccupied, my lady,” the butler said, pointing a stiff hand—palm up—toward a side chamber. He began stalking toward the staircase, moving with a sense of … inevitability. Like an ancient tree swaying in the wind.

She strolled into the room, forcing herself to hold her handbag at her side. Ladrian Mansion was decorated in a classical mode; the rugs had intricate patterns in dark shades, and the ornately carved picture frames were painted gold. Odd, that so many should favor frames that seemed to be trying to outdo the art they held.

Did it seem there was less art hanging in the mansion than there should be? Several spots on the walls were conspicuously empty. In the sitting room, she looked up at a wide painting of a field of grain, clasping her hands behind her back.

Good. She was containing her nervousness now. There was no reason for it at all. Yes, she had read report after report about Waxillium Ladrian. Yes, stories of his bravery had been part of what inspired her to study law.

However, he was far more amiable than she’d imagined. She had always pictured him as gruff and stoic. Discovering that he spoke like a gentleman had been a surprise. And, of course, there was the relaxed—if acerbic—way he interacted with Wayne. Five minutes around the two of them had destroyed years’ worth of youthful illusions about the calm, quiet lawman and his intense, devoted deputy.

Then the attack had come. The gunfire, the screaming. And Waxillium Ladrian, like a bolt of intense, bright lightning in the middle of a dark and chaotic tempest. He had saved her. How many days during her youth had she fondly dreamed of something like that happening?

“Lady Colms?” the butler said, stepping up to the doorway of the room. “I apologize, but the master says that he cannot spare the time to come down and converse with you.”

“Oh,” she said, feeling an immediate sinking in her stomach. So she’d made a fool of herself after all.

“Indeed, my lady,” the butler said, lips turning down even farther. “You are to accompany me to his study so he can converse with you there.”

Oh. Well, she hadn’t expected that.

“This way please,” the butler said. He turned around and lurched up the stairs, and she followed. At the top floor, they twisted through a few hallways—passing some serving and cleaning staff, who bobbed in respect to her—until they reached a room that dominated the far western side of the mansion.

The butler gestured for her to enter. The room beyond was much more cluttered than she’d anticipated. The shutters were closed and the shades drawn, and the large desk that dominated the far wall had been set up with tubes, burners, and other scientific-looking apparatus.

Waxillium stood to the side, holding something up with a pair of tongs and studying it intently. He wore a pair of black goggles, and had on a white shirt with sleeves rolled to the elbows. His suit coat lay draped over a chair at the side of the room, bowler hat topping it, leaving him in a diagonally checkered vest of black and gray. The room smelled of smoke and, oddly, sulfur.

“My lord?” the butler said.

Waxillium turned, goggles still on. “Ah! My lady Marasi. Come in, come in. Tillaume, you may leave us.”

“Yes, my lord,” the butler said with a suffering tone.

Marasi stepped into the room, glancing to the side where a large sheet of paper lay on the floor, folded upon itself and covered with cramped writing. Waxillium twisted a dial, and a small metal tube on the desk shot out a thin tongue of intense flame. He briefly held his tongs in the fire, then pulled them back out and dropped their contents into a small ceramic cup. He eyed it, then grabbed a glass tube from a rack on the desk and shook it.

“Here,” he said, holding it up for her to study. There was a clear liquid in it. “Does this look blue to you?”

“Er … no? Should it?”

“Apparently not,” he said. He shook the tube again. “Huh.” He set the tube aside.

She stood silently. It was so hard not to recall the sight of him breaking through the line of tables, gun in hand as he expertly felled two of the men trying to haul her out into the night. Or the sight of him soaring through the air—gunshots exploding up from beneath, the chandeliers shattering and crystal spraying light around him—as he shot a man from midair and dropped to rescue his friend.

She was talking to a legend. And he was wearing a pair of very silly goggles.

Waxillium raised them to his forehead. “I’m trying to figure out what alloy they used in those guns.”

“The aluminum ones?” she asked, curious.

“Yes, but they’re not pure aluminum. They’re something stronger, and the grain is wrong. I’ve never *seen* this alloy before. And the bullets must be yet another new alloy; I’ll need to test those next. As a side note, I’m not certain if you appreciate the advantages you possess living in the City.”

“Oh, I’d say I’m aware of many of them.”

He grinned. Oddly, he looked *younger* today than he had on their previous meetings. “I suppose that perhaps you do. I was referring specifically to the ease of shopping you enjoy here.”

“Shopping?”

“Yes, shopping! Marvelous convenience. Out in Weathering, if I wanted a gas burner that could reach the high temperatures required for testing alloys, I had to special-order it and wait for the right railway cars to come. *Then* I had to hope the equipment arrived without being damaged or broken.

“Here, however, I merely needed to send a few lads out with a list. In hours, I could set up an entire lab.” He shook his head. “I feel so spoiled. And *you* seem hesitant about something. Is it the sulfur? I needed to test the gunpowder in the bullets, you see … and, well, I suppose I should open a window.”

I will not *be nervous around him.* “It’s not that, my lord Ladrian.”

“Please, feel free to call me ‘Wax’ or ‘Waxillium,’” he said, walking over to a window. She noticed that he stood to the side as he opened it, never standing directly in the line of sight of anyone outside. The cautious behavior was natural to him, and he didn’t even seem to notice what he was doing. “There’s no need to be formal with me. I have a rule—saving my life entitles you to use my given name.”

“You saved mine first, I believe.”

“Yes. But I was already in your debt, you see.”

“Because?”

“Because you gave me an excellent excuse to shoot things,” he replied, sitting down at his desk and making a few notations on a pad there. “That seems to be something I’d been needing for quite some time.” He looked up and smiled at her. “The hesitance?”

“Should we be alone in the room, Lord Waxillium?”

“Why not?” he said, sounding genuinely confused. “Is there a mass murderer hiding in the wardrobe that I somehow missed?”

“I was actually referring to propriety, my lord.”

He sat for a moment, then smacked his forehead. “I apologize. You’ll have to forgive me for being a buffoon. It’s been a long time since I’ve had to … Never mind. If you’re uncomfortable, I’ll go call Tillaume back.” He rose, striding past her.

“Lord Waxillium!” she said. “*I’m* not uncomfortable. I assure you. I simply didn’t want to put you in an awkward position.”

“Awkward?”

“Yes.” Now she felt like a right fool. “Please. I didn’t mean to make a fuss.”

“Very well, then,” he said. “To be honest, I really *had* forgotten about things like this. It’s basically nonsense, you realize.”

“Propriety is nonsense?”

“Too much in high society is built around the idea of making certain you don’t need to trust anyone,” Waxillium said. “Contracts, detailed operating reports, not being seen alone with an eligible member of the opposite gender. If you remove the foundation of trust from a relationship, then what is the point of that relationship?”

This from someone who is marrying Steris for the express purpose of exploiting her wealth? She felt bad for the thought. It was very difficult not to feel bitter sometimes.

She moved on quickly. “So … the alloy?”

“Yes, the alloy,” he said. “Likely a tangent I shouldn’t be indulging in. An excuse to dig up an old hobby. But since I know where the aluminum itself came from—the first theft—I wondered if, perhaps, they might be using an alloy that includes components I could trace." He walked back over to his desk, where he picked up the revolver Wayne had given him the night before. She could see that he'd shaved some of the metal off the outside of the grip.

"Do you know much of metallurgy, Lady Marasi?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "I probably should."

"Oh, don't feel that way. As I said, this is an indulgence of mine. There are many metallurgists in the city; I could probably have sent these shavings to one of them and gotten a report more quickly, and more accurately." He sighed, sitting back down in his chair. "I'm just accustomed to doing things myself, you see."

"Out in the Roughs, you often didn't have another choice."

"True enough." He tapped the gun against the table. "Alloys are remarkable things, Lady Marasi. Did you realize you can make an alloy with a metal that reacts to magnetism, but end up with one that doesn't? Mix it with an equal part of something else, and you don't get something that's half as magnetically reactive—you get something that's not reactive at all. When you make an alloy, you don't just mix two metals. You make a *new* one.

"That's a fundamental of Allomancy, you see. Steel is just iron with a pinch of carbon in it, but that makes all the difference. This aluminum has something else in it too—less than one percent. I think it might be ekaboron, but that's really just a hunch. A little pinch. It works for men too, oddly. A tiny change can result in creating an entirely new person. How like metals we are.…" He shook his head, then waved for her to take a seat in a chair against the wall. "But you didn't come to hear me blather. Come, tell me, what can I do for you?"

"It's actually what I can do for you," she said, sitting. "I've spoken to Lord Harms. I thought that because of your … Well, because House Ladrian is currently lacking in liquid assets, you see, I thought that you may not have the tools you need to seek Lady Steris. Lord Harms has agreed to bankroll you for whatever you need as you pursue her rescue."

Waxillium seemed surprised. "That's wonderful. Thank you." He paused, then looked at his desk. "Do you think he'd mind paying for this…?"

"Not at all," she said quickly.

"Well, that's a relief. Tillaume nearly fainted when he saw what I'd spent. I think the old man's afraid we'll run out of tea if I keep this up. It's so incredible that I can be the source of employment for some twenty thousand people, own two to three percent of the land in the city, and yet still be so poor in ready cash. What an odd world business is." Waxillium leaned forward, clasping his hands, looking thoughtful. In the light of the open window, she could now see that he had bags under his eyes.

"My lord?" she asked. "Have you slept at all since the kidnapping?"

He didn't reply.

"Lord Waxillium," she said sternly. "You mustn't neglect your own well-being. Running yourself to rust will do no good for anyone."

"Lady Steris was taken on my watch, Marasi," he said softly. "I didn't lift a finger. I had to be *goaded* into it." He shook his head, as if to drive away bad thoughts. "But you needn't worry about me. I wouldn't have been able to sleep anyway, so I might as well be productive."

"Have you come to any conclusions?" she asked, genuinely curious.

"Too many," he said. "Often, the problem is not coming up with solutions—it's deciding which of them actually happened and which are pure fancy. Those men, for instance. They weren't professionals." He paused. "I'm sorry, that probably doesn't make any sense."

"No, it does," she said. "The way they kept itching to shoot the building up, they way their boss let himself be goaded into shooting Peterus…"

"Exactly," he said. "They had experience as thieves, certainly. But they weren't *refined* at it."

"A simple way to determine the type of criminal is by whom they kill and when," Marasi said, quoting a line from one of her textbooks. "Murders end with a hanging; thievery alone can mean escaping death. Those men, if they'd really known what they were doing, would have left quickly, glad they hadn't needed to do any shooting."

"So they're street toughs," Waxillium said. "Common criminals."

"With *very* expensive weapons," Marasi said, frowning. "Which implies an outside backer, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Waxillium said, growing eager and leaning in. "At first, I was very confused. I was *convinced* this was all about the kidnappings, the thievery just a front to disguise that. Then the men last night were genuinely interested in what they were taking. It baffled me. Judging by the price of aluminum, and how much they had to spend forging those guns, they've spent a fortune to make a lesser amount from last night's robbery. It didn't make sense."

“Unless we’re dealing with two groups working together,” Marasi said, understanding. “Someone has given funds to the bandits, allowing them to pull off these robberies. The backing group, however, demands that they kidnap certain people, making it seem like the result of random hostage-takings.”

“Yes! He—whoever the backer is—wants the kidnapped women. And the Vanishers, they get to keep whatever they steal, or perhaps a percentage of it. It *is* all meant to use the robberies as a cover-up, but it’s possible the bandits themselves don’t understand how they’re being used.”

Marasi frowned, biting her lip. “But that means…”

“What?”

“Well, I’d hoped that this was mostly over with,” she explained. “Your initial count of the thieves was just under forty, and you and Wayne killed or incapacitated thirty or so of them.”

“Thirty-one,” he said absently.

“I had assumed those remaining might cut their losses and flee. Killing three-quarters of a group should be enough to disband them, one would think.”

“It would, in my experience.”

“But this is different,” she said. “The bandit boss has an outside backer offering wealth and weaponry.” She frowned. “The boss spoke of ‘payback,’ as I recall. Could he be both the boss and the backer?”

“Perhaps,” Waxillium said. “But I doubt it. Part of the point of all this would be to have someone else doing the dangerous work for you.”

“Agreed,” she said. “But the boss *does* seem to have his own ideology. Perhaps he was chosen because of it. Criminals often use basic rationalization skills to justify what they are doing, and a man who could capitalize on that—along with promising riches and lots of fun shooting things—would be ideal as a ‘middle manager,’ so to speak.”

Waxillium smiled broadly.

“What?” she asked.

“You realize I spent all night coming to those conclusions? You just reached them in all of … what? Ten minutes?”

She sniffed. “I had some modest help from you.”

“It might be said that I had modest help from myself, technically.”

“The voices whispering to you as a result of sleep deprivation do *not* count, my lord.”

His smile grew, and then he stood. “Come. Tell me what you make of this.”

Curious, she followed him to the front of the room, where she’d noticed the heap of paper. He pulled it straight, revealing a long—perhaps five-foot—piece of paper that was several feet wide. Waxillium knelt on the ground, but she had a harder time, being in skirts. So she just bent down, looking over his shoulder.

“Genealogies?” she asked, surprised. It appeared that he’d traced each of the kidnapped women back to the Origin, starting with their names at the left of the long sheet, then working backward. It didn’t list every relative, but it included the direct ancestors and a few notable names in each generation for each hostage.

“Well?” he asked.

“I’m beginning to suspect that you are an odd man, my lord,” she said. “You spent all night doing this?”

“It did take a great deal of my time, though Wayne’s paper gave me a good head start. Fortunately, my uncle’s library had extensive genealogical resources. It was a hobby of his. But what do you *think*?”

“That it is a good thing you’re soon to be engaged, for a good wife would have seen that you got your rest, rather than writing all night by candlelight. That’s bad for your eyes, you know.”

“We have electricity,” he said, waving upward. “Besides, I doubt Steris will care about my sleeping habits. It’s not in the contract, you see.” There was a touch of bitterness in his tone—faint, but recognizable.

She’d said most of that to stall him for a few moments so she could read more of the names. “Allomancers,” she said. “You analyzed the family lines for Allomantic powers in their heritage. They all converge on the Lord Mistborn. Didn’t Wayne speak of this?”

“Yes,” he said. “I believe that the one behind all this is looking for Allomancers. He’s building an army. He picks the people he does because he suspects that they’re secretly Allomancers. The fact that they aren’t open about it makes it harder to recognize what he’s doing.”

“But Steris *isn’t* an Allomancer. I promise it.”

“That worried me for a time,” he said. “But it’s not a large issue. See, he’s picking people he thinks are *probably* Allomancers, but he’s bound to get it wrong a few times.” Waxillium tapped the paper. “That does make me worry for her. Once the backer discovers that she’s not what he thought she was, she’ll be in greater danger.”

Hence why you stayed up all night, she realized. *You think there isn’t time.*

All of this, for a woman he obviously didn’t love. It was difficult not to be jealous.

What? she thought. *You’d have had yourself be taken? Foolish girl.*

She did note that her own name was one of those listed. “You have my genealogy?” she said, surprised.

“Had to send out for it,” he said. “Made some clerks quite angry in the middle of the night, I’m afraid. You’re very odd.”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh. Um, I mean on the list. You see here? You’re second cousins with Steris.”

“And?”

“And, that means you’re … well, this is awkward to explain. You’re, essentially, a sixth cousin to the main bloodline here. All of the others, including Steris, were much better connected—you have bloodlines on your father’s side that dilute your connections. That makes you an odd target, compared to the others. I’m wondering if they picked you because they wanted to take someone random to break up their pattern and keep us guessing.”

“Possible,” she said carefully. “They didn’t know Steris had been sitting with us, after all.”

“Very true. But … here’s where it gets speculative. You see? I can come up with plenty of reasons why Steris was targeted. The history of Allomancers isn’t the only connection—because of the propinquity of high society, there are *many* other connections.

“In fact, as I look at it, the Allomancy factor is tenuous. If you’re going to train fighters, why take only women? Why bother with Allomancers in the first place, when you have the funds and means to steal all of this aluminum? They could have stopped there and been rich. And I can’t find anything to indicate, with certitude, that the other women taken were indeed Allomancers.”

They’re taking just women, Marasi thought, looking at the long lists, tying back to the Lord Mistborn. The most powerful Allomancer who ever lived. A nearly mythological figure, someone who had *all sixteen* Allomantic powers in one body. How powerful would he have been?

And suddenly, it made sense. “Rust and Ruin,” she whispered.

Waxillium looked up at her. He’d probably have seen it, if he hadn’t pushed himself so long through the night.

“Allomancy is genetic,” she said.

“Yes. Which is why it shows up so much in these lines.”

“Genetic. Taking all women. Waxillium, don’t you see? They’re not intending to build an army of Allomancers. They’re intending to *breed* one. They’re taking the women with the most direct Allomantic lines back to the Mistborn.”

Waxillium stared at his large paper, then blinked. “By the Survivor’s spear…” he whispered. “Well, at least this means Steris isn’t in immediate danger. She’s valuable to him even without being an Allomancer.”

“Yes,” Marasi said, feeling sick. “But if I’m right, then she’ll be in a different kind of danger.”

“Indeed,” Waxillium said, subdued. “I should have seen this. Wayne will never let me live it down, once he finds out.”

“Wayne,” she said, realizing she hadn’t asked after him. “Where is he?”

Waxillium checked his pocket watch. “He should be back soon. I sent him out to cause a little mischief.”

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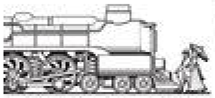

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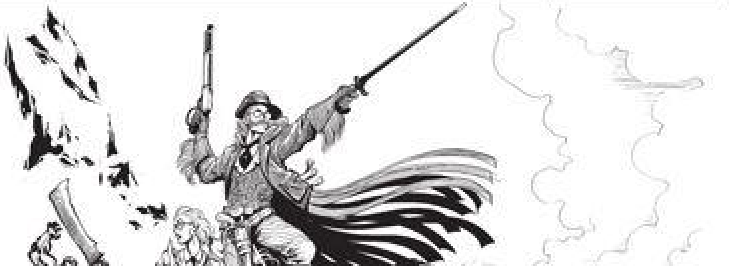


8

Wayne strode up the steps into the Fourth Octant constabulary precinct offices. His ears felt way too hot. Why was it that conners wore such uncomfortable hats? Maybe that was why they were so grouchy all the time—walking about the city, picking on respectable folk. Even after just a few weeks in Elendel, Wayne knew that was basically what constables did.

Bad hats. A bad hat could make a man right disagreeable, and that was the truth.

He burst through the double doors, slamming them open. The room inside basically looked like a big cage. A wooden railing in the front to keep people separated from the conners, desks behind for eating food or lounging and talking. His entrance caused a few of the brown-uniformed conners to sit bolt upright, some reaching for revolvers at their hips.

"Who's in charge of this place!" Wayne bellowed.

The astounded conners stared at him, then jumped to their feet, straightening uniforms and hastily sticking on their hats. He wore one of those uniforms himself. He'd traded for it at a precinct up in the Seventh Octant. He'd left a right good shirt as a replacement, as fair a trade as any man could ask. After all, that shirt had been *silk*.

"Sir!" one of the conners said. "You'll want Captain Brettin, sir!"

"Well where the hell is he?" Wayne yelled. He'd picked up the right accent from listening to just a few conners. People, they misunderstood the word "accent." They thought accents were those things everybody *else* had. But that wasn't it at all. Every person had an individual accent, a blend of where he'd lived, what he did for a living, who his friends were.

People thought Wayne imitated accents. He didn't. He outright stole them. They were the only things he was still allowed to steal, seeing as to how he'd turned to doing good with his life and stuff like that.

Several of the conners, still confused by his arrival, pointed toward a door at the side of the room. Others saluted, as if that were really the only thing they knew how to do. Wayne huffed through his thick, drooping fake mustache and stalked over to the door.

He acted as if he were just going to throw it open, but then pretended to hesitate and knocked instead.

Brettin would outrank him, barely. *Really unfortunate,* Wayne thought. *Here I am, twenty-five years as a constable, and still only a three-bar.* He should have been promoted ages ago.

As he raised his hand to knock on the door again, it flew open, revealing Brettin's lean face. He looked annoyed. "What is this racket and yelling—" He froze as he saw Wayne. "Who are you?"

"Captain Guffon Trenchant," Wayne said. "Seventh Octant."

Brettin's eyes flicked to Wayne's insignia, then back to his face. There was a moment of confusion, and Wayne could see panic in Brettin's eyes. He was trying to decide if he should remember Captain Guffon or not. The City was a big place, and—from what Wayne had overheard—Brettin was always mixing up people's names.

"I … of course, Captain," Brettin said. "Have … er, we met?"

Wayne blew out his mustaches. "We sat at the same table at the chairman's dinner last spring!" He was feeling pretty good about this accent. It was a mixture of seventh-son lord and foreman of an ironworks, with just a *hint* of canal captain. Speaking with it felt like he'd stuffed cotton in half of his mouth and had borrowed the voice from an angry dog.

But he'd spent weeks in the city now, listening in pubs in different octants, visiting the railway tracks, chatting with people in parks. He'd collected a good number of accents, adding them to the ones he'd already stolen. Even when living in Weathering, he'd taken trips to the city to gather accents. You found the best ones here.

"I … oh, of course," Brettin said. "Yes. Trenchant, I recognize you now. It has been a while."

"Never mind that," Wayne blustered. "What's this about you having *prisoners* from the Vanishers Gang? Good steel, man! We had to learn about it from the *broadsheets*!"

"We have jurisdiction here, as the event—" Brettin hesitated, looking at the room full of intrigued constables studiously pretending not to be listening. "Step inside."

Wayne eyed the watching men. Not a one of them had questioned him. Act like you were important, act like you were angry, and people just wanted to get out of your way. Basic psychology, that was. “Very well,” he said.

Brettin closed the door, speaking quickly and authoritatively. “They were captured in our octant and the crime they were committing was here. We have jurisdiction flat-out. I did send you all a missive.”

“A missive? Rust and Ruin, man! You know how many of those we get a day?”

“Well perhaps you should hire someone to sort through them,” Brettin said testily. “That’s what I eventually did.”

Wayne blew out his mustache. “Well, you could have sent someone over to inform us,” he said lamely.

“Next time, perhaps,” Brettin said, sounding satisfied for having won the argument and disarmed an angry rival. “We *are* rather busy with those prisoners.”

“Well and good,” Wayne said. “When are you sending them to us?”

“*What?*” Brettin said.

“We have prior claim! You have jurisdiction for the initial inquest, but *we* have prosecution rights. First robbery happened in our octant.” Wax had written that out for him. Bloke could be right useful, on occasion.

“You have to give us a written request for that!”

“We sent a missive,” Wayne said.

Brettin hesitated.

“Earlier today,” Wayne said. “You didn’t get it?”

“Er … We get a lot of missives…”

“Thought you said you hired someone to read them.”

“Sent him out for scones earlier, you see…”

“Ah. Well then.” Wayne hesitated. “Can I have one?”

“Of the scones or the prisoners?”

Wayne leaned in. “Look, Brettin, let’s melt this down and forge it. We both know you can stall for months with those prisoners while we complete proper transfer paperwork. That is basically worthless to both of us. You get a lot of hassle, and we lose any chance we had of catching the rest of these fellows. We need to move *quick*.”

“And?” Brettin asked, suspicious.

"I want to question a few of the prisoners," Wayne said. "Chief sent me specifically. You let me in, give me a few minutes, and we'll stop all transfer requests. You can prosecute, but we get to keep hunting for their boss."

The two locked gazes. According to Wax, prosecuting the Vanishers would be good for careers—very good. But the real prize, the boss of the gang, was still at large. Getting him would mean glory, promotions, and maybe an invitation to join the upper crust. The late Lord Peterus himself had done it, when he'd captured the Copper Strangler.

Letting a rival constable interview the prisoners would be risky. Potentially losing the prisoners completely—as Brettin chanced doing—was even more so.

"How long?" Brettin said.

"Fifteen minutes each," Wayne said.

Brettin's eyes narrowed just slightly. "Ten minutes with two of the prisoners."

"Fine," Wayne said. "Let's do it."

It took longer to set things up than it should have. Constables tended to take their time about anything unless it involved burning buildings or murders in the streets—and they ran for those two only if someone rich was involved. Eventually, they had a room set up for him and pulled one of the bandits in.

Wayne recognized him. The fellow had tried to shoot him, so Wayne had broken his arm with a dueling cane. Downright rude, trying to shoot like that. When a fellow pulls out a dueling cane, you should respond with one of your own—or at least a knife. Trying to shoot Wayne was like bringing dice to a card game. What was the world coming to?

"Has he said anything so far?" Wayne asked Brettin and several of his minions, standing outside the door and looking in at the tubby, scraggly-haired bandit. He had his arm in a dirty sling.

"Not much," Brettin said. "Actually, none of them have given us much of anything. They seem…"

"Afraid," one of the other constables said. "They're afraid of something—or, at least, more afraid of talking than they are of us."

"Bah," Wayne said. "You just need to be *firm* with them! No coddling."

"We haven't been—" the constable began, but Brettin raised a hand to quiet him. "Your time is slipping away, Captain."

Wayne sniffed, then sauntered into the room. It was small, practically a closet, with only the one door. Brettin and the others left it open. The bandit sat in a chair, manacled hands linked by chains to his feet and both locked to the floor. There was a table between them.

The bandit watched him resentfully. He didn't seem to recognize Wayne. It was probably the hat.

"So, son," Wayne said. "You're in a heap of trouble."

The bandit didn't reply.

"I can get you off easy. No hangman's noose for you, if you are willing to be smart."

The bandit spat at him.

Wayne leaned in, hands on the table. "Here now," he said very softly, changing his speech to the natural, fluid accent that the bandits had been using. A cup of canal worker for authenticity, a healthy dose of bartender for trust, and the rest Sixth Octant, north side, where most had sounded like they'd come from. "Is that the way to speak to the bloke who killed a conner and took his uniform, all to get you outta here, mate?"

The bandit's eyes opened wide.

"Don't do that, now," Wayne said softly. "You're looking too eager. That'll make 'em suspicious. Damn it all. You're gonna have to spit on me again."

The man hesitated.

"Do it!"

He spat.

"Ruination!" Wayne bellowed, swapping back to the constable accent. He pounded the table. "I'll tear your ears off, boy, if you do that again."

The bandit looked at him. "Er … should I?"

Ah, good. Got the right neighborhood. "Like hell," Wayne hissed. "I really will rip yer ears off if you do." He leaned in, speaking in the street-tough accent, low enough so those outside couldn't hear. "The conners say you haven't talked. Good job on that. The boss'll be pleased."

"You're gonna get me out?"

"What do you think? Can't leave you to sing. It's either get you out or see you shaking hands with Ironeyes."

"I won't talk," the man said urgently. "No need to kill me. I *won't talk*."

"And the others?"

The man hesitated. “I don’t think they will either. Except maybe Sindren. He’s new, and all.”

Good, Wayne thought. “Sindren. Blond fellow, with the scar?”

“No. He’s the short guy. Big ears.” The robber squinted at Wayne. “Why don’t I recognize you?”

“Why do you think?” Wayne said, standing back and resuming his constable voice. “Now, no more griping! Where is your base of operations? Where are you men working from? I want *answers*!” He leaned in again. “You don’t recognize me because I’m too valuable to be seen by the common men. They might give me away. I work with your boss. Tarson.”

“Tarson? He’s not boss of anything. He just hits stuff.”

Also good. “I meant his boss.”

The bandit frowned. He was growing more suspicious.

“Your attitude is going to get you hanged, mate,” Wayne said softly. “Who recruited you? I want to … speak with him.”

“Who … Clamps does *all* the recruitment. You should know that.” His eyes grew hostile.

Excellent, Wayne thought. “Done!” he said, turning around. “This one won’t talk. Closed-mouthed git.” He walked out of the room to join Brettin and the others.

“Why were you whispering so much?” Brettin demanded. “You said we could listen.”

“I said you could listen,” Wayne said, “but not that I’d say anything you could hear. You’ve got to speak low and threateningly with these types. Have any of the men given you names, yet?”

“Aliases,” Brettin said, dissatisfied.

“Any of them give the name Sindren?”

Brettin looked at his men. They shook their heads.

Excellent. “I want to see the other men. I’m going to pick which one to interview next.”

“That wasn’t part of the deal,” Brettin said.

“And I can still march on home and start up paperwork for a transfer…”

Brettin stewed for a moment, then led Wayne to the cells. Sindren was easy to pick out. The large-eared man looked young; he was wide-eyed as he watched the conners look into his cell.

“Him,” Wayne said. “Let’s go.”

They grabbed him and brought him to an interrogation room. Once Sindren was chained down, Brettin and his men waited in the room.

“A little space to breathe, please,” Wayne said, glaring at them.

“Fine,” Brettin said. “But no more whispering. I want to hear what you have to ask him. He *is* still our prisoner.”

Wayne glared at them, and they shuffled out, but left the door open. Brettin stood outside with his arms folded, looking at Wayne expectantly.

All right then, Wayne thought. He turned to the captive and leaned in. “Hello, Sindren.”

The boy actually jumped. “How do you—”

“Clamps sent me,” Wayne said softly in a street-tough accent. “I’m working on a way to get you out. I need you to remain perfectly still.”

“But—”

“Still. Don’t move.”

“No whispering!” Brettin called in. “If you say—”

Wayne put up a speed bubble. It wasn’t going to last long; he hadn’t been able to scrounge up much bendalloy. He’d have to make it work.

“I’m an Allomancer,” Wayne said, holding perfectly still. “I’ve sped up time for us. If you move, they’ll notice the blur and know what happened. Do you understand? *Don’t* nod yes. Just say so.”

“Um … yes.”

“Good,” Wayne said. “As I said, Clamps sent me, and I’m here to get you out. Seems the boss worries you fellows will talk.”

“I won’t!” the youth said, voice nearly a squeak as he obviously worked hard to keep himself from moving.

“I’m sure you won’t,” Wayne said, moving his accent subtly to match the area this youth was from, Inner Seventh. He tossed in a sprinkle of millworker, which he caught in this lad’s dialect. Probably from his father. “If you did, Tarson would have to break some of your bones. You know how he likes that, eh?”

The boy started to nod, but caught himself. “I know.”

“But we’ll get you out,” Wayne said. “Don’t worry. I don’t recognize you. You new?”

“Yes.”

“Clamps recruited you?”

“Just two weeks back.”

“Which base were you working out of?”

“Which one?” the lad said, frowning.

“We have several stations of operation,” Wayne said. “But of course you don’t know that, do you? The boss only shows one to new kids, in case they get caught. Wouldn’t want you to accidentally lead people to us, eh?”

“That would be awful,” Sindren agreed. He eyed the door, but kept himself still. “He put me in the old foundry over in Longard. I thought we were the only ones!”

“That’s the idea,” Wayne said. “We can’t let a simple mistake stop us from getting payback.”

“Er, yes.”

“You don’t believe in all that, do you?” Wayne said. “It’s okay. I think the boss gets a little crazy with that stuff too.”

“Yeah,” the youth said. “I mean, most of us just want the money, you know? Payback’s nice. But…”

“… money’s better.”

“Yeah. Boss is always talking about how things will be better when he’s in charge, and how the city betrayed him, and stuff. But the city betrays everyone. That’s how life is.” The youth glanced again at the constables outside the door.

“Don’t worry,” Wayne said. “They think I’m one of them.”

“How’d you do it?” the boy asked softly.

“Just gotta talk their language, son. Surprising how many people never figure that out. You’re sure they never told you about any of the other bases? I need to know which ones are in danger.”

“No,” the youth said. “I only ever went to the foundry. Stayed there pretty much all the time, except when we went out on runs.”

“Can I give you some advice, son?” Wayne asked.

“Please.”

“Get out of this business of robbing folks. You aren’t meant for it. If you ever do get free, go back to the mills.”

The boy frowned.

“Takes a special type to be a proper criminal,” Wayne explained. “You ain’t that type. You see, in this conversation, I tricked you into confirming the name of the guy who recruited you and giving the location of your base.”

The youth grew pale. “But…”

"Don't worry," Wayne said. "I'm on your side, remember? You're just lucky that I am."

"Yeah."

"All right," Wayne said, lowering his voice, remaining still. "I don't know if I can get you out by force. Face it, kid, you're not worth it. But I *can* help you. I want you to talk to the constables."

"What?"

"Give me until evening," Wayne said. "I'll go back to the base and clear the place out. Once that's done, you can sing to the conners, tell them everything you know. Don't worry, you weren't told enough to get us into real trouble. Our contingency plans will protect us. I'll tell the boss I told you to do it, and so you'll be all right.

"But don't talk to them until they promise to let you go free in return. Get a solicitor into the room; ask for one by the name of Arintol. He's supposed to be honest." At least, that was what people on the streets had told Wayne. "Get the conners to promise you freedom with Arintol in the room. Then, tell them everything you know.

"Once you're out, get away from the City. Some of the gang may not believe that I told you to talk, so it could be dangerous for you. Go to the Roughs and become a millworker. Nobody will care, there. Either way, kid, stay out of crime. You'll just end up getting someone killed. Maybe you."

"I…" The youth looked relieved. "Thank you."

Wayne winked. "Now, resist everything I ask you from here out." He started coughing and dropped the speed bubble.

"—that I can't hear," Brettin said, "I'm stopping this right here."

"Fine!" Wayne yelled. "Boy, tell me who you work for."

"I ain't giving you anything, conner!"

"You'll talk, or I'll have your toes!" Wayne yelled back.

The kid got into it, and Wayne gave the constables a good five minutes of arguing before throwing up his hands and storming out.

"I told you," Brettin said.

"Yeah," Wayne said, trying to sound dejected. "Guess you'll just have to keep working on them."

"It won't work," Brettin said. "I'll be dead and buried before these men talk."

"We could only be so lucky," Wayne said.

"What was that?"

“Nothing,” Wayne said, sniffing the air. “I believe that the scones have arrived. Excellent! At least this trip won’t be a complete waste.”

9

"So we aren't sure yet what happened," Waxillium said, sitting on the floor beside the long sheet of paper covered with his genealogical results. "The Words of Founding included a reference to two more metals and their alloys. But the ancients believed in sixteen metals, and the Law of Sixteen holds so strongly in nature that it can't be disregarded. Either Harmony changed the way that Allomancy itself works, or we never really understood it."

"Hmmm," Marasi said, sitting on the floor with her knees to the side. "I would not have expected that from you, Lord Waxillium. Lawman I had anticipated. Metallurgist, perhaps. But philosopher?"

"There is a link between being a lawman and a philosopher," Waxillium said, smiling idly. "Lawkeeping and philosophy are both about questions. I was drawn to law by a need to find the answers nobody else could, to capture the men everyone considered uncatchable. Philosophy is similar. Questions, secrets, puzzles. The human mind and the nature of the universe—the two great riddles of time."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"What was it for you?" Waxillium asked. "One does not often meet a young woman of means studying law."

"My means are not so … meaningful as they may seem at first," she said. "I would be nothing without my uncle's patronage."

"Still."

"Stories," she said, smiling wistfully. "Stories of the good and the evil. Most people you meet, they aren't quite either one."

Waxillium frowned. "I'd disagree. Most people seem basically good."

"Well, perhaps by one definition. But it seems that either one—good or evil—has to be pursued for it to be significant. People today … it seems they are good, or sometimes evil, mostly by *inertia*, not by choice. They act as their surroundings prepare them to act.

"It's like … well, think of a world where everything is lit with the same modest light. All places, outside or inside, lit by a uniform light that cannot be changed. If, in this world of common light, someone suddenly produced a light that was significantly brighter, it would be remarkable. By the same token, if someone managed to create a room that was dim, it would be remarkable. In a way, it doesn't matter how strong the initial illumination was. The story works regardless."

"The fact that most people are decent does not make their decency any less valuable to society."

"Yes, yes," she said, blushing. "And I'm not saying I wish that everyone were less decent. But … those bright lights and those dim places fascinate me, Lord Waxillium—particularly when they're dramatically out of order. Why is it that in one instance, a man raised in a basically good family—surrounded by basically good friends, with good employment and satisfactory means—starts strangling women with copper wires and sinking their bodies in the canals?

"And conversely, consider that most men who go to the Roughs adapt to the general climate of lax sensibilities there. But some others—a few remarkable individuals—determine to bring civilization with them. A hundred men, convinced by society that 'everybody does it this way,' will go along with the most crude and despicable of acts. But one man says no."

"It's really not as heroic as all that," Waxillium said.

"I'm certain it doesn't look that way to you."

"Have you ever heard the story of the first man I brought in?"

She blushed. "I … yes. Yes, let's just say that I've heard it. Peret the Black. A rapist and an Allomancer—Pewterarm, I believe. You walked into the lawkeeper station, looked at the board, ripped his picture off and took it with you. Came back three days later with him over the saddle of your horse. Of all the men on the board, you picked the most difficult, most dangerous criminal of the bunch."

"He was worth the most money."

Marasi frowned.

"I looked at that board," Waxillium said, "and I thought to myself, 'Well, any of these blokes is right likely to kill me. So I might as well pick the one worth the most.’ I needed the money. I hadn’t had anything to eat in three days but jerky and a few beans. And then there was Taraco.”

“One of the great bandits of our era.”

“With him,” Waxillium said, “I figured I could get some new boots. He’d robbed a cobbler just a few days earlier, and I thought if I brought the man in, I might manage to get a new pair of boots out of it.”

“I thought you’d picked him because he’d shot a lawkeeper over in Faradana the week before.”

Waxillium shook his head. “I didn’t hear that until after I brought him in.”

“Oh.” Then, remarkably, she smiled in eagerness. “And Harrisel Hard?”

“A bet with Wayne,” Waxillium said. “You don’t look disappointed.”

“This just makes it more real, Lord Waxillium,” she said. Her eager eyes glittered in an almost *predatory* way. “I need to write these down.” She fished in her handbag, pulling out a pad and pencil.

“So that’s what motivated you?” Waxillium asked as she scribbled notes. “You study out of a desire to be a hero, like in the stories?”

“No, no,” she said. “I just wanted to learn about them.”

“Are you sure?” he said. “You could become a lawkeeper, go out to the Roughs, live these same stories. Don’t think that you can’t because you’re a woman; high society might lead you to believe that, but it doesn’t matter out beyond the mountains. Out there, you don’t have to wear lacy dresses or smell like flowers. You can belt on some revolvers and make your own rules. Don’t forget, the Ascendant Warrior herself was a woman.”

She leaned forward. “Can I admit something to you, Lord Waxillium?”

“Only if it’s salacious, personal, or embarrassing.”

She smiled. “I *like* the lacy dresses and smelling like flowers. I *like* living in the city, where I can demand modern conveniences. Do you realize I can send for Terris food at *any hour* of the night, and have it delivered?”

“Incredible.” It actually was. He hadn’t realized that was possible.

“As much as I like reading about the Roughs, and though I may like to visit, I don’t think I’d take well to living there. I don’t mix well with dirt, grime, and an overall lack of personal hygiene.” She leaned in. “And, to be perfectly honest, I have no problem at all letting men like you be the ones to belt on revolvers and shoot people. Does that make me a terrible traitor to my sex?”

“I don’t think so. You *are* pretty good at shooting things, though.”

"Well, shooting *things* is okay. But people?" She shivered. "I know the Ascendant Warrior is a model for self-actualized women. We have classes on it at the university, for Preservation's sake, and her legacy is written into the law. But I don't really want to put on trousers and be her. I feel like a coward for admitting it sometimes."

"It's all right," he said. "You have to be yourself. But none of that explains why you are studying law."

"Oh, I do want to change the city," she said, growing eager. "Though I feel that tracking down every criminal and punching holes in them with pieces of metal moving at high speeds is a terribly inefficient way to do it."

"Sure can be fun, though."

"Let me show you something." She dug in her handbag a little more, and came out with some folded-up sheets of paper. "I spoke of how people generally act in response to their surroundings. Remember our discussion about the Roughs, and how there are often *more* lawkeepers per person there than here? And yet, crime is more prevalent. That's the result of environment. Look here."

She handed over some of the pages. "This is a report," she said. "I'm putting it together myself. It's about the nature of crime as related to environment. See here, this discusses the major factors that have decreased crime in some sections of the city. Hiring more constables, hanging more criminals, that sort of thing. They are of medium efficacy."

"What's this at the bottom?" Waxillium asked.

"Renovation," she said with a deep smile. "This case is where a wealthy man, Lord Joshin himself, purchased several parcels of land in one of the less reputable areas. He began renovating and cleaning up. Crime went way down. The people didn't change, just their environment. Now that area is a safe and respectable section of the city.

"We call it the 'broken windows' theory. If a man sees a broken window in a building, he's more likely to rob or commit other crimes, since he figures nobody cares. If all the windows are maintained, all the streets clean, all the buildings washed, then crime goes down. Just as a hot day can make a person irritable, it appears that a run-down area can make an ordinary man into a criminal."

"Curious," Waxillium said.

"Of course," she said, "this isn't the only answer. There will always be people who don't respond to their surroundings. They fascinate me, as I've mentioned. Anyway, I've always been good with numbers and figures. I see patterns like this and wonder. Cleaning up a few streets can be cheaper than employing more constables—but can actually decrease crime to a greater degree."

Waxillium looked over the reports, then back at Marasi. She had a flush of excitement in her cheeks. There was something captivating about her. How long had they been here? He hesitated, then pulled out his pocket watch.

"Oh," she said, glancing at the watch. "We shouldn't be chatting like this. Not with poor Steris in their hands."

"We can't do more until Wayne returns," Waxillium said. "In fact, he should have been back by now."

"He is," Wayne's voice said from the hallway outside.

Marasi jumped, letting out a faint yelp.

Waxillium sighed. "How long have you been out there?"

Wayne's head poked around the corner, wearing a constable's hat. "Oh, a little while. Seemed like you two were having some kind of 'smart people' moment. Didn't want to interfere."

"Wise of you. Your stupidity can be infectious."

"Don't use your fancy words 'round me, son." Wayne strolled in. Though he wore the constable's hat, he was otherwise normally dressed in his duster and trousers, dueling canes at his hips.

"Did you succeed?" Waxillium asked, standing up, then reaching down to help Marasi to her feet.

"Sure did—I got some scones." Wayne grinned. "And the dirty conners even paid for them."

"Wayne?"

"Yes?"

"*We're* dirty conners."

"Not no more," he said proudly. "We're independent citizens with a mind toward civic duty. And eating the scones of dirty conners."

Marasi grimaced. "They don't sound that appetizing when described that way."

"Oh, they were good." Wayne reached into the pocket of his duster. "Here, I brought you some. Got a little mushed up in my pocket, though."

"No, really," she said, paling.

Wayne, however, chuckled and brought out a paper that he waved at Waxillium. “Location of the Vanishers’ hideout in the city. Along with the name of their recruiter.”

“Really?” Marasi said eagerly, rushing over to take the paper. “How did you do this?”

“Whiskey and *magic*,” Wayne said.

“In other words,” Waxillium said, walking up and reading the paper over Marasi’s shoulder, “Wayne did a lot of fast talking. Nice work.”

“We need to get going!” Marasi said, urgent. “Go there, get Steris, and —”

“They won’t be there anymore,” Waxillium said, taking the paper. “Not after having several of their members captured. Wayne, did you manage to get this without the constables hearing?”

He looked offended. “What do you think?”

Waxillium nodded, rubbing his chin. “We *should* probably go soon. Get to the scene before it gets too cold.”

“But…” Marasi said. “The constables…”

“We’ll drop them an anonymous tip once I’ve seen the place,” Waxillium said.

“Won’t be needed,” Wayne added. “I set a fuse.”

“For when?”

“Nightfall.”

“Nice.”

“You can show your appreciation with a big fat nugget of a rare and expensive metal,” Wayne said.

“On the desk,” Waxillium said, folding the paper and sliding it into his vest pocket.

Wayne walked over, glancing at the apparatus set up on the desk. “I’m not sure if I want to touch any of this, mate. I’m rather fond of all of my fingers.”

“It’s not going to explode, Wayne,” he said dryly.

“You said that—”

“It happened *once*,” Waxillium said.

“Do you know how bloody annoying it is to regrow fingers, Wax?”

“If it’s on par with your complaining, then it’s likely appalling indeed.”

“I’m just sayin’,” Wayne said, scanning the desk until he found the bottle of bendalloy flakes. He snatched that, then backed away warily. “The most innocent-looking of things have a tendency to explode around you. A bloke has to be cautious." He shook the bottle. "This isn't much."

"Don't act spoiled," Waxillium said. "That's far more than I could have gotten you on short notice if we'd been out in the Roughs. Drop the hat. Let's go look at this foundry your notes mention."

"We can use my carriage, if you like," Marasi said. To the side, Tillaume walked in, carrying a basket in one hand and a tray with tea in the other. He set the basket beside the door, then set the tray on the table and began pouring tea.

Waxillium eyed Marasi. "You want to come? I thought you said you wanted to leave the shooting to men like me."

"You said they won't be there," she replied. "So there's really no danger."

"They still want you," Wayne noted. "They tried to grab you at the dinner. It'll be dangerous for you."

"And they'd likely shoot either one of you without blinking," she said. "So how will it be any less dangerous for you?"

"I suppose it ain't," Wayne admitted.

Tillaume walked over, bringing a cup of tea for Waxillium on a small tray. Wayne plucked it off with a grin, though Tillaume tried to pull the tray away.

"How convenient," Wayne said, holding the teacup. "Wax, why didn't you ever get me one of these chaps back in Weathering?" The butler shot him a scowl, then hurried back to the table to prepare another cup.

Waxillium considered Marasi. There was something he was missing, something important. Something about what Wayne had said …

"Why *did* they take you?" Waxillium asked Marasi. "There were better targets at that party. Women closer to the bloodlines they wanted."

"You said she might have been a decoy to throw us off," Wayne said, dumping some bendalloy into his teacup, then downing the entire thing in one draught.

"Yes," Waxillium said, looking into her eyes and seeing a flash of something there. She turned away. "But if that were the case, they'd have wanted to take someone that wasn't close to the same bloodline at all, not one who was a near cousin." He pursed his lips, and then it clicked. "Ah. You're illegitimate, then. Steris's half sister, by Lord Harms, I assume."

She blushed. "Yes."

Wayne whistled. “Wonderful show, Wax. Usually *I* wait to call someone a bastard until the second date.” He eyed Marasi. “Third if she’s pretty.”

“I…” Waxillium felt a sudden burst of shame. “Of course. I didn’t mean…”

“It’s quite all right,” she said softly.

It made sense. Marasi and Lord Harms had grown so uncomfortable when Steris had spoken of mistresses. And then there was the specific clause about them in the contract; Steris was accustomed to infidelity on the part of a lord. That also explained why Harms was paying for the education and housing of Steris’s “cousin.”

“Lady Marasi,” Waxillium said, taking her hand. “Perhaps my years in the Roughs affected me more than I’d assumed. There was a time when I gave *thought* to my words before speaking them. Forgive me.”

“I am what I am, Lord Waxillium,” she said. “And I have grown comfortable with it.”

“It was still crude of me.”

“You needn’t apologize.”

“Huh,” Wayne said thoughtfully. “Tea’s poisoned.”

With that, he toppled to the ground.

Marasi gasped, immediately going to his side. Waxillium spun, looking at Tillaume just as the butler turned from his supposed tea preparations and leveled a pistol at Waxillium.

There was no time for thought. Waxillium burned steel—he kept it in him when he thought he might be in danger—and Pushed on the third button of his vest. He always wore one made of steel there, to use either for restoring his metal reserves or as a weapon.

It burst from his vest, streaking across the room and striking Tillaume in the chest just as he pulled the trigger. The shot went wild. Neither the bullet nor the gun registered as metal to Waxillium’s Allomantic senses. Aluminum, then.

Tillaume stumbled to the side and dropped the gun, pulling himself along the bookshelf in an attempt to flee. He left a line of blood on the floor before collapsing at the door.

Waxillium dropped to his knees beside Wayne. Marasi had jumped at the gunshot, and was staring at the gasping butler.

“Wayne?” Waxillium said, lifting his friend’s head.

Wayne's eyes fluttered open. "Poison. I *hate* poison. Worse than losin' a finger, I tell you."

"Lord Waxillium!" Marasi said, alarmed.

"Wayne will be fine," Waxillium said, relaxing back. "So long as he can talk and he has some Feruchemical reserves, he can pull through just about anything."

"I'm not talking about him. The butler!"

Waxillium looked up with a start, realizing that the dying Tillaume was fiddling with the basket he'd brought in—the man reached a bloodied hand into it and pulled on something.

"Wayne!" Waxillium cried. "Bubble. *Now!*"

Tillaume fell back. The basket erupted in a blossoming ball of fire.

And then froze.

"Aw, hell," Wayne said, rolling over to look at the explosion in progress. "I warned you. I *said* things are always blowing up around you."

"I refuse to take responsibility for this one."

"He's *your* butler," Wayne said, coughing and crawling to his knees. "Blarek! It wasn't even *good* tea."

"It's getting bigger!" Marasi said, alarmed as she pointed at the explosion.

The fire blast had vaporized the basket before Wayne got his bubble up. The blast wave was slowly expanding outward, burning away the carpet, destroying the doorframe and the bookshelves. The butler himself had already been engulfed.

"Damn," Wayne said. "That's a big one."

"Probably meant to look like an accident with my metallurgy equipment," Waxillium said. "Burning our bodies, covering the murder."

"Shall we go out the windows, then?"

"That blast is going to be hard to outrun," Waxillium said thoughtfully.

"You could do it. Just gotta Push hard enough."

"Against what, Wayne? I don't see any good anchors in that direction. Besides, if I launch us backward that fast, going out the window is going to shred us and rip our bodies apart."

"Gentlemen," Marasi said, voice growing frantic, "it's getting *bigger*."

"Wayne can't stop time," Waxillium said. "Just slow it greatly. And he can't move the bubble once he's made it."

“Look,” Wayne said. “Just blow the wall out. Push against the nails in the window frames and blast open the side of the building. Then you can shoot us out that direction without us running into anything.”

“Do you even listen to yourself when you say these things?” Waxillium asked, hands on hips as he regarded his friend. “That’s *brick* and *stone*. If I Push too hard, I’ll just throw myself backward into the explosion.”

“It’s getting *really, really* close!” Marasi said.

“So make yourself heavier,” Wayne said.

“Heavy enough so that I don’t move when an entire *wall*—a well-built, extremely heavy one—is ripped off a building?”

“Sure.”

“The floor would never be able to take it,” Waxillium said. “It would shatter, and…”

He trailed off.

Both of them looked down.

Snapping into motion, Waxillium grabbed Marasi, pulling her over with a yelp. He rolled onto his back, holding her tightly atop him.

The explosion was taking up most of their field of vision now, having consumed a large portion of the room. It swelled closer and closer, glowing with angry yellow light, like a bubbling, bursting pastry expanding in an enormous oven.

“What are we—” Marasi said.

“Hold on!” Waxillium said.

He amplified his weight.

Feruchemy didn’t work like Allomancy. The two categories of power were often lumped together, but in many ways, they were opposites. In Allomancy, the power came from the metal itself, and there was a limit to how much you could do at once. Wayne couldn’t compress time beyond a certain amount; Waxillium could Push only so hard on a piece of metal.

Feruchemy was powered by a sort of cannibalism, where you consumed part of yourself for later use. Make yourself weigh half as much for ten days, and you could make yourself one and a half times as heavy for a near-equal amount of time. Or you could make yourself twice as heavy for half that time. Or four times as heavy for a quarter of that time.

Or extremely heavy for a few brief moments.

Waxillium drew into himself weight he’d stored in his metalminds across days spent going around at three-quarters weight. He became heavy as a boulder, then as heavy as a building, then *heavier*. All this weight was focused on one small section of the floor.

The wood crunched, then burst, exploding downward. Waxillium dropped out of Wayne's bubble of speed and hit real time, the shift jostling him. The next few moments were a blur. He heard the awesome sound of the explosion above—it hit with a wave of force. He released his metalmind and Pushed against the nails in the floor below them, trying to slow himself and Marasi.

He didn't have enough time to do it well. They crashed into the floor of the next story down, and something heavy landed on them, driving the breath from Waxillium's lungs. There was glaring brightness and a burst of heat.

Then it was over.

Waxillium lay dazed, ears ringing. He groaned, then realized that Marasi was clinging to him, shaking. He held her close for a moment, blinking. Were they still in danger? What had fallen on them?

Wayne, he thought. He forced himself to move, rolling over and setting Marasi aside. The floor beneath them had been crushed practically to splinters, the nails flattened to little disks. Part of his downward Push must have been while he still had the increased weight.

They were covered with chips of wood and plaster dust. The ceiling was a wreck, sections of wood smoldering, bits of ash and debris wafting down. There was nothing left of the hole he'd broken; the blast had consumed it and the floor around it.

Wincing, he moved Wayne. His friend had fallen on them and blocked the brunt of the explosion from above. His duster had been shredded, his back exposed, blackened and burned, blood dribbling down his sides.

Marasi raised a hand to her mouth. She was still trembling, her dark brown hair tangled, eyes wide.

No, Waxillium thought, uncertain if he should try to turn his friend over or not. *Please, no.* Wayne had used a portion of his health to recover from the poison. And last night, he'd said he only had enough left for one bullet wound.…

Anxious, he felt at Wayne's neck. There was a faint pulse. Waxillium closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. As he watched, the wounds on Wayne's back began to draw closed. It was a slow process. A Bloodmaker using Feruchemical healing was limited by how fast he wanted the power to work—recovering quickly required a much greater expenditure of health. If Wayne didn't have much left, he'd need to work at a slow pace.

Waxillium left him to it. Wayne would be suffering great pain, but there was nothing he could do. Instead, he took Marasi's arm. She was still trembling.

"It's all right," Waxillium said, his voice sounding odd and muffled because of the explosion's effect on his hearing. "Wayne is healing. Are you injured?"

"I…" She looked dazed. "Two in three sufferers of great trauma are unable to correctly identify their own injuries as a result of stress or the body's own natural coping mechanisms covering the pain."

"Tell me if any of this hurts," Waxillium said, feeling at her ankles, then legs, then arms for breaks. He carefully prodded her sides for broken ribs, though it was difficult through the thick cloth of her dress.

She slowly came out of her daze, then looked at him and pulled him close, tucking her head against his chest. He hesitated, then wrapped his arms around her and held her as she steadied her breath, obviously trying to get hold of her emotions.

Behind them, Wayne started coughing. He stirred, then groaned and lay still, letting the healing continue. They'd fallen into a spare bedroom. The building was burning, but not too badly. Likely the constables would soon be called.

Nobody has come running, Waxillium thought. *The other staff. Are they all right?*

Or were they part of it? His mind was still trying to catch up. Tillaume—a man who, as far as he knew, had served his uncle faithfully for decades—had tried to kill him. Three times.

Marasi pulled back. "I think I … I think I've composed myself. Thank you."

He nodded to her, pulling out his handkerchief and handing it over, then knelt by Wayne. The man's back was crusted with blood and burned skin, but it had been lifted and raised as scabs, new skin forming underneath.

"Is it bad?" Wayne asked, eyes still closed.

"You'll pull through."

"I meant the duster."

"Oh. Well … you're gonna need a *really* big patch this time."

Wayne snorted, then pushed himself up and moved into a sitting position. He winced several times during the process, then finally opened his eyes. Trails of tears were running down the side of his face. “I told you,” Wayne said. “Innocent things are *always* exploding around you, Wax.”

“You kept your fingers this time.”

“Great. I can still strangle you.”

Waxillium smiled, resting his hand on his friend’s arm. “Thanks.”

Wayne nodded. “I apologize for havin’ to fall on you two.”

“I’ll forgive you, under the circumstances.” Waxillium glanced at Marasi. She sat with her arms wrapped around herself, hunched forward, face pale. She saw his scrutiny, then lowered her arms, as if forcing herself to be strong, and began to stand up.

“It’s all right,” Waxillium said. “You can take more time.”

“I’ll be well,” she said, though it was hard to make out the words, as his hearing was still dulled. “I just … I’m unaccustomed to people trying to kill me.”

“You don’t ever get accustomed to it,” Wayne said. “Trust me.” He took a deep breath, then pulled off the remnants of his duster and shirt. Then he turned his burned back to Waxillium. “You mind?”

“You may want to turn away, Marasi,” Waxillium said.

She frowned, but didn’t look away. So he grabbed the burned layer at Wayne’s shoulder and—with a jerk—ripped the skin off his back. It came free in almost a single complete sheet. Wayne grunted.

New skin had formed underneath, pink and fresh, but it couldn’t finish healing properly until the old, stiff, burned layer had been removed. Waxillium tossed it aside.

“Oh, *Lord of Harmony,*” Marasi said, raising a hand to her mouth. “I think I might be sick.”

“I warned you,” Waxillium said.

“I thought you were referring to his burns. I didn’t realize you were going to tear off his *entire back*.”

“It feels much better now.” Wayne rolled his arms in his shoulders, now shirtless. He was lean and muscled, and he wore a pair of gold metalmind bracers on his upper arms. His trousers had been singed, but were mostly intact. He reached down, pulling one of his dueling canes out of the wreckage. The other was still at his waist. “Now they owe me a hat *and* a duster. Where’s the rest of the house staff?”

"I've been wondering that myself," Waxillium said. "I'll do a quick search and see if anyone's hurt. You get Marasi out the back. Sneak through the grounds and out the garden gate; I'll meet you there."

"Sneak?" Marasi asked.

"Whoever hired that bloke to kill us," Wayne said, "will be expecting that explosion to mean we've gone to meet Ironeyes."

"Right," Waxillium said. "We'll have an hour or two while the house is searched and Tillaume is identified—if there's enough left to identify. During that time, we'll be thought dead."

"It'll give us a little time to think," Wayne said. "Come on. We should move quick."

He led Marasi down the back stairs toward the grounds. She still seemed dazed.

Waxillium's ears felt like they were stuffed with cotton. He suspected the three of them had been shouting their conversation. Wayne was right. You never got used to people trying to kill you.

Waxillium began a quick search of the house, and started refilling his metalminds as he did. He became much lighter, about half his normal weight. Any more than that and it became difficult to walk normally, even with clothing and guns weighing him down. He was practiced at it, though.

During his search, he found Limmi and Miss Grimes unconscious, but alive, in the pantry. A glance out the window showed the coachman, Krent, standing with his hands on his head and looking at the burning building with eyes wide. Of the other house staff—the maids, the errand boys, the cook—there was no sign.

They might have been close enough to the blast to be caught in it, but Waxillium didn't think that likely. Probably, Tillaume—who had charge over household staff—had sent away everyone that he reasonably could, then had drugged the others and stuffed them someplace safe. It indicated a desire to ensure that nobody was hurt. Well, nobody but Waxillium and his guests.

In two quick trips, Waxillium carried the unconscious women out into the back garden—being careful not to be seen. Hopefully, they would soon be discovered by Krent or the constables. After that, Waxillium fetched a pair of revolvers from the closet on the main floor and got a shirt and jacket from the laundry for Wayne. He wished he could look for his old trunk, with his Sterrions, but there wasn't time.

He slipped out the back door and crossed the garden on too-light feet. Each step of the way, he was increasingly bothered by what had happened. It was horrible for someone to try to kill you; it was worse when the attack came from someone you knew.

It seemed implausible that the bandits would have been able to contact and bribe Tillaume so quickly. How could they have even known that an aging butler would be amenable? The groom or gardener would have been a far safer choice. Something more was going on here. From Waxillium's first day in the city, Tillaume had been trying to discourage him from getting involved in local lawkeeping. On the night before the ball, he'd pointedly tried to get Waxillium to drop the subject of the robberies.

Whoever was behind this, the butler had been working with them for some time. And that meant they'd been watching Waxillium all along.

10

The carriage rattled on the paving stones as it rolled in a cautiously circuitous route toward the Fifth Octant. Marasi looked out at the busy street, her arms folded. Horses and carriages passed, and people flowed down sidewalks like the little blood cells through veins she'd looked at under a microscope at the university. They got clogged at corners or at sections where the paving stones were being replaced.

Lord Waxillium and Wayne sat on the other side of the carriage. Waxillium looked distracted, lost in his thoughts. Wayne was napping, head tipped back, eyes closed. He'd found a hat somewhere—a flimsy cap, of the type broadsheet boys liked to wear. After fleeing the mansion, they'd rounded the street corner and cut through Dampmere Park. On the other side, Waxillium had waved them down a carriage.

By the time they'd piled in, Wayne had been pulling on the cap, whistling softly to himself. She had no idea where he'd gotten it. Now he was snoring softly. After they'd nearly been killed, after he'd had the skin on his back seared off, he was sleeping. She could still smell the pungency of burned cloth, and her ears were ringing.

This was what you wanted, she reminded herself. *You're the one who insisted Lord Harms bring you along to meet Waxillium. You came to the mansion today of your own accord. You put yourself into this.*

If only she'd made a better show of herself. She was riding in a carriage with the greatest lawman that the Roughs had ever known—but at every occasion, she'd proven herself to be a helpless girl, prone to bursts of useless emotion. She started to sigh, but cut herself off. No. No sulking. That would only make things worse.

They were paralleling one of the great spoke-canals that divided the eight parts of the city. She'd seen reproductions of pages from the Words of

Founding, which had included drawings and plans for Elendel, though the name of the city had been chosen by the Lord Mistborn. There was a large round park at the center where flowers bloomed year-round, the air warmed by a hot spring underneath. The canal spokes radiated from it, extending out into the bountiful hinterlands, and the river divided around it. Streets and blocks were laid out in an orderly way, with large streets—wider than anyone would once have assumed they'd need. Yet now they almost seemed insufficient.

The carriage was approaching the bridge to the Field of Rebirth; the blanket of green grass and blooming Marewill flowers rose in a gradual hillside slope. The statues of the Last Emperor and the Ascendant Warrior dominated the top, capping their tomb. There was a museum there. Marasi had been there several times as a girl to look at the relics of the World of Ash that had been saved by the Originators, those who had been nurtured in wombs of the earth and reborn to build society.

The carriage turned along the tree-shaded drive around the Field of Rebirth. Asphalt paving was used here instead of stones to quiet the clatter of steel-shod hooves, and also smoothed the way for the occasional motorcar. Those were still rare, but one of her professors claimed that they would eventually replace horses.

She tried to keep her mind on their task. There was more to the Vanishers than just the kidnappings and the robberies. What of the way the trains' cargo disappeared so abruptly, giving the Vanishers their name? And what of the extremely well-made weapons? And then there was the major effort to kill Waxillium, both with poison and that bomb.

"Lord Waxillium?" she said.

"Yes?"

"How did your uncle die?"

"Carriage accident," he said, looking thoughtful. "He, his wife, and my sister were riding in the Outer Estates. This was mere weeks after my cousin—the heir—had succumbed to disease. The trip was supposed to help ease their grief.

"Uncle Ladrian wanted to visit a particular peak to get a view of the landscape, but my aunt was too weak for the hike. They took a carriage. Along the way, the horse bolted. The hitchings snapped. The carriage went off the cliffside."

"I'm sorry."

“I am as well,” he said softly. “I hadn’t been to see any of them in years. I feel a strange guilt, as if I should be more crushed to lose them.”

“I think that story involves enough crushed people already,” Wayne murmured.

Waxillium gave him a glare, though Wayne didn’t see it, as his eyes were still closed, the cap resting on his face.

Marasi kicked him in the shin, causing him to yelp. Then she blushed. “Be respectful of the dead,” she said.

Wayne rubbed his leg. “Already she starts orderin’ me around. Women.” He put his cap back on his face and settled back.

“Lord Waxillium,” she said. “Did you ever wonder if…”

“If someone might have killed my uncle?” Waxillium asked. “I am a lawkeeper. I wonder, if just briefly, about *every* death I hear of. But the reports I received indicated nothing suspicious. One of the things I learned early in my career was that sometimes, accidents simply *do* happen. My uncle was a risk taker. His gambling youth led to a middle age where he sought thrills. I eventually dismissed the tragedy as an accident.”

“And now?”

“And now,” Waxillium said, “I wonder if the reports sent to me were a little *too* clean. In retrospect, everything might have been carefully crafted not to arouse my suspicions. Beyond that, Tillaume was there, though he remained behind at the manor house the day of the accident.”

“Why would they kill your uncle?” Marasi asked. “Shouldn’t they have been worried about bringing you, an experienced lawkeeper, back to town? Removing your uncle and accidentally putting Waxillium Dawnshot onto them…”

“Waxillium *Dawnshot*?” Wayne asked, cracking an eye. He sniffled softly and wiped his nose with his handkerchief.

She blushed. “Sorry. But it’s what the reports call him.”

“That’s what they should call me,” Wayne said. “I’m the one who likes a good shot of whiskey in the morning.”

“‘Morning’ to you is well past noon, Wayne,” Waxillium said. “I doubt you’ve ever seen the dawn.”

“That’s right unfair. See it all the time, when I stay up too late.…” He grinned underneath his hat. “Wax, when are we going to go see Ranette?”

“We’re *not*,” Waxillium said. “What makes you think we will?”

“Well, we’re in town. She’s in town too—moved here before you did, and all. Our house exploded. We could go see her, you know. Be all friendly, like.”

“No,” Waxillium said. “I wouldn’t even know where to find her. The City is a big place.”

“She lives over in the Third Octant,” Wayne said absently. “Redbrick house. Two stories.”

Waxillium gave Wayne a flat stare, which Marasi found curious. “Who is this person?”

“Nobody,” Waxillium said. “How are you with a pistol?”

“Not good,” she admitted. “The target club uses rifles.”

“Well, a rifle doesn’t fit in a handbag,” Waxillium said, taking a pistol out of his shoulder holster. It was small, with a slim barrel. The entire weapon was only about as long as her hand.

She took the gun hesitantly.

“The trick to shooting with a pistol is to be steady,” Waxillium said. “Use both hands, find low cover if you can and set your arms on it. Don’t shake, take your time, and be sure to sight. Pistols are much harder to hit with, but that’s partially because people tend to be wilder with them. The very nature of a rifle encourages you to take aim, while people’s first impulse with a pistol seems to be to just point vaguely and pull the trigger.”

“Yes,” she said, hefting the gun. It was deceptively heavy. “Eight of ten of constables firing a handgun at a criminal ten feet away miss.”

“Really?”

She nodded.

“Well,” Waxillium said, “I guess Wayne doesn’t need to feel so bad.”

“Hey!”

Waxillium eyed her. “I once saw him try to shoot someone three paces away. He ended up hitting the wall *behind* himself.”

“’S not my fault,” Wayne grumbled. “Bullets are devious buggers. They shouldn’t be allowed to bounce. Metal don’t bounce, and that’s true as titanium.”

She checked the small revolver to make sure the safety was on, then tucked it into her singed handbag.

The Vanishers’ hideout turned out to be an innocent-looking building near a canal dock. Two stories tall, it was flat-topped and wide, with numerous chimneys. Piles of dark ashes and slag were heaped along one wall of the building, and the windows looked like they hadn't been cleaned since the Final Ascension.

"Lady Marasi," Waxillium asked, checking the sights on his revolver, "would you be terribly offended if I suggested you wait in the carriage while we reconnoiter? The place is likely abandoned, but I wouldn't be surprised to find a few traps left behind."

"No," she said, shivering. "I wouldn't mind. I think that would be just fine."

"I'll wave when we're certain the place is clear," he said, then raised his handgun and nodded to Wayne. They ducked out of the carriage, running in a low squat to the side of the building. They didn't go to the door. Instead, Wayne jumped—and Waxillium must have Pushed him, for the wiry man leaped a good twelve feet and landed on the roof. Waxillium followed, jumping more gracefully, landing without a sound. They moved over to the far corner, where Wayne swung down and kicked in a window. Waxillium swung in after him.

She waited a few tense minutes. The coachman didn't say a word about any of it, though she heard him muttering "none of my business" to himself. Waxillium had paid him enough that he'd better stay quiet.

No gunshots sounded. Eventually, Waxillium opened the door to the building and waved. She hurriedly climbed from the carriage and approached.

"Well?" she asked.

"Two tripwires," Waxillium said, "rigged with explosives. Nothing else dangerous we could find. Other than Wayne's body odor."

"That's the smell of *incredibleness,*" Wayne called from inside.

"Come on," Waxillium said, holding the door open for her.

She stepped in, then hesitated in the doorway. "It's empty."

She'd expected forges and equipment. Instead, the cavernous room was vacant, like a classroom during winter holiday. Light shone in through windows, though it was very dim. The chamber smelled of coal and fire, and there were blackened areas on the floor.

"Sleeping quarters up there," Waxillium said, pointing at the other side of the foundry. "The main chamber here is double height for half the building, but the other side has a second story. Looked like they could house some fifty men in there, men who could act like foundry workers during the days to maintain the front."

“Aha!” Wayne said from the darkness on the left side of the chamber. She heard a rattling, then light flooded the room as he pushed back the wall. It opened there, rolling to give large-scale access to the canal.

“How easily did that open?” Waxillium asked, trotting over. Marasi followed.

“I dunno,” Wayne said, shrugging. “Easy enough.”

Waxillium inspected the door. It slid on wheels in a small channel cut into the floor. He rubbed his fingers in the trench and brought them out, rubbing grease between them.

“They’ve been using it,” Marasi said.

“Exactly,” Waxillium said.

“So?” Wayne asked.

“If they were doing illegal things in here,” Marasi said, “they wouldn’t be wanting to open the entire side of the building with any frequency.”

“Maybe they did it to keep up the act,” Waxillium said, rising.

Marasi nodded, thoughtful. “Oh! Aluminum.”

Wayne pulled out his dueling canes, spinning. “What? Where? Who’s shooting?”

Marasi felt herself blush. “Sorry. I meant, we should check and see if we can find any aluminum droplets on the ground. You know, from forging or casting guns. That will tell us if this place is *really* the hideout, or if Wayne’s source was trying to lead us to a bad alloy.”

“He was honest,” Wayne said. “I got a sense for that sort of thing.” He sneezed.

“You believed that Lessie really was a dancer, the first time we met her,” Waxillium said, rising.

“That’s different. She was a woman. Good at lying, they are. The God Beyond made’m that way.”

“I’m … not certain how I should take that,” Marasi said.

“With a pinch of copper,” Waxillium said. “And a healthy dose of skepticism. Just like anything Wayne says.” He held out his hand.

Marasi frowned, raising her palm. He dropped something into it. Some bits of metal that looked like they’d been scraped off the floor, where they’d cooled. They were silvery, light, and dirty black around the edges.

“I found them on the floor over there,” Waxillium said. “Near one of the blackened sections.”

“Aluminum?” she asked eagerly.

“Yes,” he said. “At least, I can’t Push them with Allomancy, which along with their appearance is sufficient indication.” He studied her. “You’ve got a good mind for this sort of thing.”

She blushed. *Again. Rust and Ruin!* she thought. *I’m going to have to find a way to deal with that.* “It’s about deviations, Lord Waxillium.”

“Deviations?”

“Numbers, patterns, movements. People seem erratic, but they actually follow patterns. Find the deviations, isolate the reason why they deviated, and you’ll often learn something. Aluminum on the floor. It’s a deviation.”

“And are there others, here?”

“The opening door,” she said, nodding to the side. “Those windows. They’re smeared with too much soot. If I were to guess, it was put there by burning a candle close to the glass to blacken it so nobody could peek in.”

“Maybe it was natural,” Waxillium said. “From forging.”

“Why would the windows be *closed* during the heat of forging? Those windows can open easily, and they open outward—so there wouldn’t be any soot on them. Not so much, at least. Either they left them closed while working in order to hide what was in here, or they darkened them intentionally.”

“Clever,” Waxillium said.

“So the question is,” she said, “what have they been moving in and out of the building through that large side door? Something important enough that they’d open it, even after going through so much trouble with the windows.”

“That part, at least, is easy,” Waxillium said. “They’ve been robbing freight cars, so they’ve been moving the cargo in.”

“Which implies they’ve been shipping it after stealing it…” Marasi said.

“Which gives us a lead,” Waxillium said with a nod. “They’ve been moving things in and out of this location via the canals. In fact, the canals might be connected to how they’re getting the cargo out of the railway cars so easily.” He strode away toward the door.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I’m going to go sniff around outside,” he said. “You two go look through the sleeping quarters. Tell me if you see any … deviations, as you put it.” He hesitated. “Let Wayne go in first. We might have missed a trap or two. Better for him to explode than you.”

“Hey!” Wayne said.

"I mean it with all fondness," Waxillium said, slipping out through the open side of the building. Then he leaned back in. "And maybe it will blow your face off, and spare us having to look at that mug of yours." With that, he left.

Wayne smiled. "Damn. Sure is good to see him acting more like himself again."

"So he wasn't always so solemn?"

"Oh, Wax has always been solemn," Wayne said, wiping his nose with his handkerchief. "But when he's at his best, there's a smirk underneath. C'mon."

He led her to the back part of the building. There was a small box by the wall, the explosives they had discovered and disarmed, she assumed. The ceiling was lower here. Wayne climbed up a stairwell, gesturing for her to wait.

She poked around, looking for anything that had been discarded, but succeeded only in making herself jump a few times when she thought she saw something from the corner of her eye. This side of the chamber was very dim.

Was Wayne taking too long? She fidgeted, then finally decided to climb the stairwell.

It was *dark* inside. Not pitch dark, just dark enough that she thought she should be able to see what she was doing—but couldn't. She hesitated halfway up the stairs, then decided she was a fool and pushed forward.

"Wayne?" she said, nervous as she peeked out of the stairwell. The upper floor was lit by a few windows, darkened by soot, despite being in an area where there would be no forging or casting. That reinforced her theory. And her nervousness.

"He is dead, young lady," an aged, distinguished voice said from the darkness. "I am sorry for your loss."

Her heart just about stopped.

"Yes," the voice continued, "he was simply too handsome, too clever, and too immensely remarkable in all aspects of his existence to allow to live." Someone pushed open a window, letting in light and revealing Wayne's face. "I'm afraid it took a hundred men to bring him down, and he killed all but one. His last words were, 'Tell Wax … that he's a total git … and he still owes me five notes.'"

"Wayne," she hissed.

“Couldn’t help myself, mate,” he said, switching back to his own voice, which was completely different. “Sorry. But you shouldn’t have come up here.” He nodded to the corner, where a few sticks of something lay against the wall.

“More explosives?” she said, feeling faint.

“Yeah. We missed them on the first pass. Were rigged to blow when the latch was opened on a chest in the corner.”

“Was there anything *in* the chest?”

“Yeah. Explosives. Weren’t you listening?”

She gave him a flat stare.

“No,” he said, chuckling. “I don’t know what Wax expects us to find in this place. Swept it clean, they did.”

By the light of the open window, she could make out a low-ceilinged room. Well, more of a loft. She and Wayne could walk in it without bending over, but him just barely. Waxillium would have to stoop.

The floorboards were warped and there were nails sticking out in places. She had images of prying one up and finding some stash of hidden clues, but as she felt across the floor, she realized she could see between the boards to the floor below. There wasn’t really any space for hiding things.

Wayne poked through some cupboards built into the wall, checking for explosives, then knocking for hidden compartments. Marasi looked around, but quickly determined that there wasn’t anything to find here. Other than, perhaps, the explosives.

Explosives.

“Wayne, what kind of explosives are those?”

“Hum? Oh, ordinary stuff. They call it dynamite, used for blowing holes in rock out in the Roughs. Pretty easy to get, even in the city. These are smaller sticks than I’ve seen, but basically the same stuff.”

“Oh.” She frowned. “Were they in anything?”

He hesitated, then looked back at the trunk. “Huh.” He reached in and held up something. “They weren’t *in* anything, but someone used this to prop up the fuse and the detonator.”

“What is it?” she asked, hurrying over.

“Cigar box,” he said, letting her see it. “Citizen Magistrates. Expensive brand. Very expensive.”

She looked over the box. The top was painted gold and red, with the brand splayed across in large letters. There weren’t any cigars left, though it *did* look like some numbers had been scribbled across the inside of the lid in pencil. The sequence didn't make any sense to her.

"We'll show it to Wax," Wayne said. "This is just the sort of thing he likes. It'll probably lead him to some grand theory about how our boss smokes cigars, and that'll somehow let him pick the guy out of a crowd. He's always doing stuff like that, ever since we started working together." Wayne smiled, taking the cigar box back, then returned to poking around the cupboards.

"Wayne," Marasi said. "How *did* you end up with Waxillium, anyway?"

"That wasn't in your reports?" he asked, knocking at the side of a cupboard.

"No. It's considered a bit of a mystery."

"We don't talk about it much," Wayne said, voice muffled, head inside the cupboard. "He saved my life."

She smiled, sitting down on the floor, resting her back against the wall. "That's probably a good story."

"It's not what you're thinking," he said, pulling his head out. "I was to be hanged over in Far Dorest, by the lawkeeper there."

"Wrongfully, I assume?"

"Depends on your definition of that particular word and all," Wayne said. "I shot a man. Innocent one."

"Was it an accident?"

"Yeah," Wayne said. "I only meant to rob him." He paused, looking at the cupboard, seeming distant. He shook his head, then crawled inside, pushing hard and breaking in the back wall.

That wasn't what she'd expected to hear. She sat back, hands around her legs. "You were a criminal?"

"Not a very capable one," Wayne said from inside the cupboard. "I've always had a problem not taking things. I just grab stuff, you know? And then it's there, in my fingers. Anyway, I was getting good at it, and I had some friends … they convinced me that I should go a little farther. Really take hold of my destiny, they said. Start going for coin, get into robbing with guns and the like. So I tried it out. Left a man dead. Father of three."

He pulled out of the broken cupboard, then held something up. It looked like cards of some sort.

"Clues?" she asked eagerly.

“Nudes,” he said, flipping through them. “Old ones. Probably from before our bandits bought this place.” He flipped through a few more, then tossed them back into the hole. “At least it will give the conners something fun to find.” He looked back at her, seeming … haunted, his eyes lying in shadow, face lit on one side by the open window.

“So what happened?” she asked softly. “With you, I mean. Unless you don’t want to tell.”

He shrugged. “I didn’t really know what I was doing, and I panicked. I think maybe I wanted to be caught. Never wanted to shoot that bloke. Just wanted his purse, you know? Old Deadfinger caught me easy. He didn’t even have to beat a confession out of me.” Wayne was quiet for a moment. “I cried the whole time. I was sixteen. Just a kid.”

“Did you know you were an Allomancer?” she asked.

“Sure. That was kinda why I was in the Roughs in the first place, but that’s another story. Anyway, bendalloy is hard to make. Bismuth and cadmium aren’t the kinds of metals you find in your corner store. Didn’t know much about Feruchemy yet, though my father was a Feruchemist, so I had an idea. But storing health, it takes gold.”

He walked over, sitting down on the floor beside her. “Still don’t know why Wax saved me. I shoulda hanged, you know. Killed a good man. He wasn’t even rich. He was a bookkeeper. Did charity work for anyone who needed it—wills drawn up, letters read. Every week, he transcribed letters for the mine workers who couldn’t write, so they could send them home to their families in the city. Found out a lot about him in the trial, you see. Got to see his kids crying. And his wife…”

Wayne reached into his pocket, then unfolded something. A sheet of paper. “Got a letter from them a few months back.”

“They write you *letters*?” Marasi said.

“Sure. I send them half of what I make. Keeps the kids fed, you know. Figure it makes sense, seein’ as to how I killed their daddy. One went to university.” He hesitated. “They still hate me. Write me the letters to let me know they haven’t forgiven me, that no money will bring back their daddy. They’re right. But they do take the money, so that’s something.”

“Wayne…” Marasi said. “I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah. Me too. Some mistakes, though, you can’t fix by being sorry. Can’t fix them, no matter what you do. Guns and me, we haven’t gotten along ever since. My hand starts shaking when I hold one, wobbling about like a damn fish dumped on the docks. Ain't that the funniest thing? Like my hand thinks by itself."

The sound of footsteps came from the stairwell and a few moments later Waxillium walked in. He raised an eyebrow at the two of them sitting there on the floor.

"See now," Wayne said. "We're having a heart-to-heart, here. Don't go stomping in and making a mess of things."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Waxillium said. "I spoke with the local beggars. The Vanishers *have* been moving something large in and out of the building and onto a canal boat. They did it on several occasions, always at night. It seems to have been bigger than just cargo; some kind of machinery, I suspect."

"Huh," Wayne said.

"Huh indeed," Waxillium said. "You?"

"Found a box," Wayne said, holding out the cigar box. "Oh, and some more dynamite. In case you want to blast out a new canal or something."

"Bring it," Waxillium said. "Might be useful." He took the cigar box.

"There's some nudie pictures too," Wayne noted, pointing at the cupboard. "They're so faded you can barely make out the good parts, though." He hesitated. "The ladies ain't wearing any guns, so you probably wouldn't be interested anyway."

Waxillium snorted.

"The cigar box is of an expensive variety," Marasi said, standing up. "Unlikely to be from one of the common thieves, unless they took it from someone. But look. Someone wrote some numbers on the inside."

"Indeed," Waxillium said. He narrowed his eyes, then looked at Wayne, who nodded.

"What?" she said. "You know something?"

Waxillium tossed the box back to Wayne, who tucked it away inside the pocket of his coat. It was large enough that it hung out. "Have you ever heard the name Miles Dagouter?"

"Sure," she said. "Miles Hundredlives. He's a lawkeeper, out in the Roughs."

"Yes," Waxillium said somberly. "Come on. I think it's time for us to take a trip. While we go, I'll tell you a few stories."

11

Miles stood by the railing and lit his cigar. He puffed on it a few times to get it going, then slowly released a stream of pungent smoke from between his lips.

"They've been spotted, boss," Tarson said as he walked up. Tarson's arm was in a sling; most men would still be in bed after taking a shot like he had. But Tarson was a Pewterarm and koloss-blooded. He'd heal quickly.

"Where?" Miles asked, looking down and surveying the setup of the new hideout. Besides Tarson, the only one up here with him was Clamps, third-in-command.

"They're at the old foundry," Tarson said. He was still wearing Wayne's hat. "Were talking to the beggars there."

"Should have dumped the lot of them in the canal," Clamps grumbled, scratching at the scar on his neck.

"I'm not going to start killing beggars, Clamps," Miles said softly. He wore a pair of aluminum revolvers; they gleamed in the electric lights of the large chamber. "You'd be surprised at how quickly something like that can backfire; turn the city's underclass against us, and all *kinds* of inconvenient information will find its way to the constables."

"Yeah, sure," Clamps said. "Of course. But, I mean, those beggars … they saw things, boss."

"Wax would have figured it out regardless," Miles said. "He is like a rat. Wherever you least wish him to be, there you will find him. In a way, that makes him predictable. I assume your explosive traps—foolproof though you promised they would be—were ineffective?"

Clamps coughed into his hand.

"Pity," Miles said. He took his silver lighter, still in his hand from lighting the cigar, and put it back in his pocket. It bore the seal of the lawkeepers of True Madil. It made the other men uncomfortable to see that. Miles kept it anyway.

The space before them was completely windowless. Big, glaring electric lights hung from the ceiling, and men were setting up forging and casting equipment. Miles was skeptical. A foundry below the ground? But Mister Suit promised that his ducts and electric fans would pull the smoke away and circulate the air. It helped that there was a lot less smoke with the electric furnaces they'd be using down here.

This room was very curious. A large tunnel led off into darkness on the left side of the chamber, and railway tracks were set into it. The beginnings, Mister Suit said, of an *underground* railway line in the city. How would it cut through the canals? It would have to run under them, he guessed. A strange image.

As of now, that tunnel was only a test. It led a short distance to a large wooden building, where Miles could quarter the rest of his men. He had another thirty or so. At the moment, they were bringing in boxes of supplies and what was left of their aluminum. There wasn't much. In one blow, Wax had all but upended the Vanishers.

Miles puffed on his cigar, thoughtful. As always, he was drawing upon his goldmind, invigorating himself, refreshing his body. He never felt sick, never lacked energy. He still had to sleep, and he still grew old, but other than that, he was practically immortal. So long as he had enough gold.

That was the problem though, wasn't it? Smoke curled in front of him, twisting upon itself like the mists.

"Boss?" Clamps asked. "Mister Suit is waiting. Aren't you going to go meet with him?"

Miles blew out smoke. "In a moment." Suit did *not* own him. "How is recruitment, Clamps?"

"It's … I'll need more time. One day ain't enough, 'specially following half of us getting slaughtered."

"Watch your tone," Miles said.

"Sorry."

"Wax was bound to enter the game eventually," Miles said softly. "He changes the rules, and it is true that we lost far more men than I would have liked. We are fortunate at the same time, however. Now that Waxillium has entered, we can anticipate him."

“Boss,” Tarson said, leaning in, “there’s talk among the men. That you and Wax … that you two set us all up.” He cringed back, as if expecting a violent reaction.

Miles puffed on his cigar, and managed to contain his initial burst of anger. He was getting better at that. A little. “Why would they say that?”

“You were once a lawkeeper, and all…”

“I still am,” Miles said. “What we do, it is not outside the law. Not the *true* law. Oh, the rich will make their own codes, will force us to live by them. But our law is the law of humanity itself.

“Men who work for me, they are given the dispensation of reform. Their work here washes away their previous … infractions. Tell them I am proud of them, Clamps. I realize we’ve been through something traumatic, but we did survive. We will face tomorrow with greater strength.”

“I’ll tell ’em, boss,” Clamps said.

Miles covered a grimace. He couldn’t decide if the words were the right ones or not; he wasn’t meant for preaching. But the men needed conviction from him, so conviction he would display. “Fifteen years,” he said softly.

“Boss?”

“Fifteen years I spent out in the Roughs, trying to protect the weak. And you know what? It never got better. All that effort, it meant nothing. Children still died, women were still abused. One man wasn’t enough to change things, not with the corruption here at the heart of civilization.” He took a puff on his cigar. “If we’re going to change things, we need to change them here, first.”

And Trell help me if I’m wrong. Why had Trell made men like him, if not to see wrongs righted? The Words of Founding had even included a lengthy explanation of Trellism and its teachings, which proved men like Miles were special.

He turned and moved along the walkway. It hung like a balcony on the north side of the large chamber. Tarson and Clamps stayed behind; they knew he liked to be alone when he faced Mister Suit.

Miles pulled open the door at the end of the walk, and entered Mister Suit’s office. Why he needed an office here, Miles didn’t know; perhaps he’d be keeping a closer eye on operations at this new base. Mister Suit had wanted them here from the beginning. It annoyed Miles that he’d finally had to accept the offer—it put him more closely under his backer’s thumb.

Enough good robberies, and we won't need him any longer, Miles told himself. *Then we can move somewhere else.*

Mister Suit was a round-faced man with a full gray-streaked beard. He sat at his desk sipping a cup of tea and wearing an extremely stylish and expensive suit of black silk with a turquoise vest. As Miles entered, he was studying a broadsheet.

"You know I don't like the smell of those," Mister Suit said without looking up.

Miles puffed his cigar anyway.

Mister Suit smiled. "Did I hear that your old friend has *already* located your previous base of operations?"

"Men were captured," Miles said simply. "It was only a matter of time."

"They aren't very loyal to your cause."

Miles had no response to that. They both knew that most of his men worked for the money, and not for any greater purpose.

"Do you know why I like you, Miles?" Mister Suit asked.

I don't particularly care if you do or not, Miles thought, but held his tongue.

"You're careful," Mister Suit continued. "You have a goal, you believe in it, but you don't let it cloud your vision. In fact, your cause is not so different from that of my associates and me. I think it is a worthy goal, and you a worthy leader." Mister Suit turned over his broadsheet. "The shootings at the last robbery threaten to undermine my confidence in that assessment."

"I…"

"You lost your temper," Mister Suit said, voice growing cold, "and you therefore lost control of your men. *That* is why this disaster occurred. There was no other reason."

"Yes there was. Waxillium Ladrian."

"You should have been ready for him."

"He wasn't supposed to be there."

Mister Suit sipped his tea. "Come now, Miles. You wore a mask on your face. You knew there was a chance he'd come."

"I wore a mask," Miles said, keeping his temper with some effort, "because I am a man of some renown. Wax wasn't the only one who could have recognized me."

“A valid point, I suppose. But then, with how dramatic you insist on being—cargo that vanishes, rather than just being stolen, it makes me wonder why you avoid being recognized.”

“The drama serves a purpose,” Miles snapped. “I’ve told you. So long as the police are baffled by how we’re getting the cargo, it will keep them making mistakes.”

“And the drama?” Suit said idly, turning over a newspaper on his desk. “The ‘Vanishers,’ Miles?”

He said nothing. He’d explained his reasons before, the ones he let Suit know of. There was more to it, of course. He needed to be dramatic, needed to capture the public’s attention. Miles was out to change the world. You couldn’t do that if people thought of you as common thieves. Mystery, power, a pinch of magic … that could work wonders for his cause.

“No comment,” Suit said. “Well, your reasoning has proven valid in the past. Except when it comes to Waxillium. I’ll admit, Miles, that part of me wonders. Is there some ancient grudge between the two of you I should be aware of? Something that, perhaps, would have caused you to act recklessly?” Mister Suit’s eyes were as cold as iron. “Something that would have made you try to *goad* him into attacking during that party? So you could fight him?”

Miles held that gaze, then leaned down, hands on the table, fingers gripping his cigar. “I have no grudge against Waxillium Ladrian. He is one of the finest men this world has known. A finer man than you or I, or practically anyone else in this city.”

“And this is supposed to comfort me? You all but say that you won’t fight him.”

“Oh, I’ll fight him. Kill him, if I have to. Wax chose the wrong side. Men like him, men like me, we have a choice. Serve the people or serve the wealthy. He abandoned his right to protection the moment he returned to this city and started mingling with them.”

“Curious,” Suit said. “I’m also one of *them,* you know.”

“I work with what I have. And besides, you have … other things recommending you. Especially since you did renounce your claim to privilege.”

“Not to privilege,” Suit said. “Merely to title. And I still think you intended to provoke Waxillium. That’s why you shot Peterus.”

“I shot Peterus because he was an impostor,” Miles snapped. “He pretended to seek justice, and everyone praised him for it, but all the while he was pandering to the elite and the corrupt. In the end, they let him come play at their parties, like a favored dog. I put him down.”

Mister Suit nodded slowly. “Very well.”

“I *will* clean this city up, Suit. Even if I have to rip out its blackened heart with my fingernails, I’ll do it. But you’re going to need to get me more aluminum.”

“I am setting things in motion,” Suit said. He opened a drawer in his desk and took out a rolled sheet of paper. He set it in front of Miles.

Miles took off the string and unrolled the paper. Schematics. “Tekiel’s new ‘unrobbable’ freight car?”

Suit nodded.

“It will take time to—” Miles began.

“I’ve had people working on this for some time now. Your job is not the planning, Miles. Your job is the execution. I will see that you have the resources you need.”

Miles looked over the blueprint. Suit was connected. Powerful. Miles couldn’t help feeling that he’d gotten himself entangled in something far beyond his control. “My men are still holding the latest captive,” he said. “What do you want done with her?”

“That will be arranged,” Suit said. He took a sip of his tea. “If I had been paying closer attention, I would have removed that one from the list. Waxillium will not stop seeking her. It would have been so much easier if the explosion had worked. Now we must contemplate more direct action.”

“I’ll deal with him personally,” Miles said. “Today.”

* * *

“Miles Dagouter is Twinborn,” Waxillium said, leaning forward in their train car. “A particularly dangerous variety of Twinborn.”

“Double gold,” Wayne said with a nod, reclining on the cushioned bench opposite Waxillium. Outside, the outer suburbs of Elendel passed in a blur.

Marasi sat on the bench near Wayne. “Gold Allomancers aren’t particularly dangerous, from what I’ve read.”

“No,” Waxillium said. “They aren’t. But it’s the Compounding that makes Miles so powerful. If your Allomancy and Feruchemy share a metal, you can access its power tenfold. It’s complicated. You store an attribute inside the metal, then *burn* it to release the power. It’s called Compounding. By the legends, it’s the way the Sliver gained immortality.”

Marasi frowned. “I’d assumed stories of Miles’s extraordinary healing abilities to be exaggerations. I assumed he was just a Bloodmaker, like Wayne.”

“Oh, he’s a Bloodmaker all right,” Wayne said, spinning a dueling cane around his wrist and catching it again. “Except *he* doesn’t ever run out of health.”

Waxillium nodded, thinking back to years ago, when he’d first met Miles. The man had always made him uncomfortable, but he’d also been an excellent lawkeeper. For the most part.

Noting Marasi’s confused look, Waxillium explained, “Normally a Feruchemist has to be sparing. It can take months to store up health or weight. I’ve been walking around at half weight since breaking us through the floor, trying to recover some of what I expended. I’ve barely filled my metalmind to a fraction of what I lost. It’s even harder for Wayne.”

Wayne wiped his nose. “I’ll have to spend a few weeks in bed after this, feeling wretched. Otherwise, I’ll be unable to heal myself. Hell, I’m already storing as much as I can and still move about normally. By the end of the day, I’ll barely have enough to heal a scratch.”

“But Miles…” Marasi said.

“Near-infinite healing ability,” Waxillium said. “The man’s virtually immortal. I heard he once took a shotgun blast to the face point-blank and walked away from it. We worked together out in the Roughs. He was the lawkeeper over in True Madil. There were three of us that had a kind of alliance going, during the good years. Miles, me, and Jon Deadfinger from Far Dorest.”

“Miles doesn’t like me much,” Wayne noted. “Well … neither of them do, actually.”

“Miles did good work,” Waxillium said. “But he was judgmental and harsh. We respected one another, though mostly from a distance. I wouldn’t call us friends. But out in the Roughs, anyone who stands up for what is right is an ally.”

“It’s the first law of the Roughs,” Wayne said. “The more alone you are, the more you need a man you can trust at your side.”

“Even if their methods go beyond what you’d choose yourself,” Waxillium said.

“He doesn’t sound like the type to take up a life of crime,” Marasi said.

“No,” Waxillium said softly. “He doesn’t. But I was almost certain it was him behind the mask at the wedding, and that box of cigars, they’re his favorites. I can’t be sure it’s him, but…”

“But you think it is.”

Waxillium nodded. *Harmony helps us, but I do.* Lawkeepers were a special alloy. There was a code. Never give in, never let yourself be tempted. Working with criminals day in, day out could change a man. You began to see things the way they did. You started to think like them.

They all knew this job could twist you if you weren’t careful. They didn’t speak of it, and they didn’t give in. Or they weren’t supposed to.

“I’m not surprised,” Wayne said. “Did you ever hear how he spoke of people in Elendel, Wax? He’s a brutal man, Miles is.”

“Yes,” Waxillium said softly. “I hoped he’d stay focused on keeping order in his town and let his demons slumber.”

The train passed beyond the suburbs, heading into the Outer Estates—the broad ring of orchards, fields, and pastures that fed Elendel. The landscape changed from city blocks to open expanses of tan and green, the canals shimmering blue as they cut the land.

“Does this change things?” Marasi asked.

“Yes,” Waxillium said. “It means all this is far more dangerous than I’d thought.”

“Delightful.”

Wayne grinned. “Well, we wanted you to have the full experience. You know, for science and all.”

“Actually,” Waxillium said, “I’ve been thinking of how best to send you someplace safe.”

“You want to be rid of me?” she asked. She widened her eyes to look heartbroken, her voice softening in a pitiful kind of betrayed way. He was half tempted to think she’d been learning from Wayne. “I thought I was being of help to you.”

“You are,” Waxillium said. “But you also have little practical experience in what we are doing.”

“A woman must gain experience somehow,” she said, lifting her head. “I’ve already survived a kidnapping and an assassination attempt.”

The doors of the passenger car rattled as they rounded a bend. “Yes, but Lady Marasi, the presence of a Twinborn on the other side changes things. If it comes to a fight, I don’t think I can defeat Miles. He’s crafty, powerful, and determined. I’d rather you were somewhere safe.”

“Where?” she asked. “Any of your estates would be obvious, as would those of my father. I can’t very well hide in the underground of the city; I *highly* doubt I’d be inconspicuous there! I hasten to suggest that the safest place for me is near you.”

“Odd,” Wayne said, “I usually find the safest places in life are everywhere *but* near Wax. Have I mentioned the likelihood of explosions?”

“Perhaps we should just go to the constables,” Marasi said. “Lord Waxillium … this kind of private investigation is technically illegal—at least insofar as we have important facts that the constables don’t. We are required to bring what we know to the authorities.”

“Don’t get him thinking!” Wayne said. “I was just starting to get him to stop saying stuff like that!”

“It’s all right, Wayne,” Waxillium said softly. “I’ve made a promise. I told Lord Harms I’d return Steris to him. And I will. That is that.”

“Then I will remain and help,” Marasi said. “That is that.”

“And I could really use some food,” Wayne added. “Fat is fat.”

“Wayne…” Waxillium said.

“I’m serious,” Wayne said. “Ain’t had nothing to eat since those scones.”

“We’ll get something at our stop,” Waxillium said. “First, I would like to know something from Lady Marasi.”

“Yes?”

“Well, assuming you are to remain with us, I’d like to know what kind of Allomancer you are.”

Wayne sat up with a start. “Huh?”

Marasi blushed.

“You carry a pouch of metal shavings in your handbag,” Waxillium said. “And you are always anxious to keep the handbag close. You know little about Feruchemy, but seem to understand Allomancy. You weren’t surprised when Wayne stopped time in a bubble around us—in fact, you stepped right up to the barrier, as if familiar with them. And you come from a hereditary line that is being hunted precisely because it includes a lot of Allomancers.”

"I…" she said. "Well, there really wasn't a good opportunity…" She blushed more furiously.

"I'm surprised, and a little disappointed," Wayne said.

"Well," she said quickly, "I—"

"Oh, not at you," Wayne said. "At Wax. I'd have expected that he'd put this sort of thing together on your first meeting."

"I'm growing slow in my old age," Waxillium said dryly.

"It's not really very useful," she said, looking down. "When I saw Wayne using his Slider ability, I started to get self-conscious. You see, I'm a Pulser."

As he'd suspected. "I think that could be very useful."

"Not really," she said. "Speeding up time … that is amazing. But what can one do with slowing it down, and only for myself? It's useless in a fight. Everyone else would move with great speed around me. My father was ashamed of the power. Told me to keep it quiet, much like my parentage."

"Your father," Waxillium said, "is someone that I'm increasingly certain is a fool. You have access to something useful. No, it won't fit every situation, but no tool does."

"If you say so," she said.

A merchant came down the train aisle, selling pretzels, and Wayne all but leaped out of his chair to get one. Waxillium settled back, looking out the window, thinking.

Miles. No, he couldn't be sure it was him. When Waxillium had shot the Vanisher boss in the face and dropped him, he'd assumed that he'd mistaken the voice. Miles wouldn't drop to a gunshot.

Unless he'd known that he had to feign a wound, lest Waxillium recognize him. Miles was crafty enough for something like that.

It is *him,* Waxillium thought. He'd known it from the first time the Vanisher boss had spoken. He just hadn't wanted to admit it.

This complicated things immensely. And, oddly, Waxillium found himself feeling overwhelmed. Twenty years as a lawkeeper, and this situation was already messier than any he'd investigated. He'd assumed that the Roughs made him strong, but there'd also been a simplicity to life out there, a simplicity he'd gotten used to.

Now he came charging in, guns raised, assuming he could handle a problem built on Elendel's scale. He assumed he could take down a team that was so well funded it could field men with guns made of something so expensive it might as well have been gold.

Maybe we should take it to the constables, Marasi had said. But could he?

He fingered the earring in his pocket. He'd felt that Harmony wanted him to do this, to investigate. But what was Harmony but an impression in Waxillium's mind? Confirmation bias, they called it. He felt what he expected to. That was what his logical brain said.

I wish I could feel the mists, he thought. *It's been weeks since I've been able to go out in them.* He always felt stronger in the mists. He felt like someone was watching, when he was out in them.

I have to continue with this, he told himself. He'd tried abstaining, and it had led to Lord Peterus being shot. Waxillium's usual method was to just take command and do what needed to be done. It was the way a lawman learned to work, out in the Roughs. *We aren't so different, Miles and I,* he thought. Perhaps that was what had always frightened him so much about the man.

The train slowed, pulling into their station.

12

Wayne stepped out of the carriage, following Waxillium and Marasi. He looked up to the carriage man, tossing him a coin. “We’ll need you to wait a spell, mate. I trust it won’t be a problem.”

The carriage man looked at the coin and raised an eyebrow. “No problem at all, mate.”

“That’s quite the hat,” Wayne said.

The carriage man wore a round cap of stiff felt, conical, but with a flat top and a feather on it. “We all wear ’em,” he said. “Mark of Gavil’s Carriages, you see.”

“Huh. Wanna trade?”

“What? Trade hats?”

“Sure,” Wayne said, tossing up his flimsy knit cap.

The man caught it. “I’m not sure…”

“I’ll throw in a pretzel,” Wayne said, fishing it out of his pocket.

“Er…” The man looked down at the coin in his hand, which was quite substantial. He pulled off his cap and tossed it down to Wayne. “No need. I guess … I’ll just buy another.”

“Mighty nice of you,” Wayne said, taking a bite from the pretzel as he sauntered after Waxillium. He put the cap on. It wasn’t a terribly good fit.

He hurried to catch up to the other two, who had stopped on a small hill. Wayne breathed in, smelling the humidity of the canal, the scents of wheat in the fields and flowers at their feet. Then he sneezed. He hated filling his metalmind when he was out doing stuff. He preferred to fill it in large chunks. That made him very sick, but he could sleep it off and drink a lot to pass the time.

This was worse. Filling his metalmind as much as he dared, storing up health as they went about, meant he got sick. Fast. He sneezed a lot more, his throat grew sore, and his eyes watered. He felt tired and groggy, too. But he'd need that health, so he did it.

He walked across the grass. The Outer Estates were an odd place. The Roughs were dry and dirty. The City was densely populated and—in places—grimy. Out here, things were just … nice.

A little too nice. Made his shoulders itch. This was the kind of place where a man would work in the field during the day, then go home and sit on his porch, drinking lemonade and petting his dog. Men died of boredom in places like that.

Odd, that in a place so open, he could feel even more anxious and confined than when locked in a cell.

"The last railway robbery happened here," Waxillium said. He held out his hand to the tracks—which rounded a bend just to their left—then moved his hand along their path, as if seeing something Wayne wasn't. He often did things like that.

Wayne yawned, then took another bite of his pretzel. "What whasdat, sir? What whazzat sir? What whassat, sir?"

"Wayne, what are you babbling about?" Waxillium turned, inspecting the canal to the right. It was wide and deep here, intended for carrying barges full of food into the city.

"Practicing my pretzel guy," Wayne said. "He had a great accent. Must have been from one of the new rim towns, right by the southern mountains."

Waxillium glanced at him. "That hat looks ridiculous."

"Fortunately, I can change hats," Wayne said in the pretzel-guy accent, "while you, sir, are stuck with that face."

"You two sound a lot like siblings," Marasi said, watching curiously. "Do you realize that?"

"So long as I'm the handsome one," Wayne said.

"The tracks here bend toward the canal," Waxillium said. "The other robberies all happened near canals as well."

"As I recall," Marasi noted, "most of the railway lines parallel the canals. The canals were here first, and when the tracks were laid, it made sense to follow the established paths."

"Yes," Waxillium said. "But it's especially striking here. Look how close the tracks get to the canal."

His accent is changing, Wayne thought. *Only six months back in the city, and it already shows. It's more refined in some ways, less formal in others.* Did people see how their voices were like living things? Move a plant, and it would change and adapt to the environment around it. Move a person, and the way they talked would grow, adapt, evolve.

"So that machinery the Vanishers are using," Marasi said, "you're thinking they can't move it far on land? They have to ship it up the canal, and pick a place near the tracks to set it up and carry out their robbery?"

Her accent … Wayne thought. *She uses more elevated diction around him than around me.* She tried so hard to impress Wax. Did he see it? Probably not. The man had always been oblivious about women. Even Lessie.

"Yes," Waxillium said, hiking down the hillside. "The question is, how did this thing—whatever it is—empty the freight cars so quickly and efficiently?"

"Why is that so odd?" Wayne said, following him. "If I'd been a Vanisher, I'd have brought a whole heap of men. That would let me finish the work faster."

"This isn't a question of simple manpower," Waxillium said. "The train cars were locked, and some of the later ones had guards inside. When the cars arrived at their destination, they were still locked, but empty. Beyond that, from one of the cars, many heavy ingots of iron were stolen. There's a bottleneck at the car door—beyond a certain point, more men wouldn't have helped. There is no way they unloaded hundreds of ingots in under five minutes using just manpower."

"A speed bubble?" Marasi asked.

"Could have helped," Wax said, "but not much. You'd have the same bottleneck, and you can't fit many people in a speed bubble. Let's say you could have six workers inside, which would be really tight. They'd have to move the iron ingots up to the edge of the speed bubble, then drop the bubble and create another—you can't move the bubbles once they're up—and repeat."

Wax shook his head, hands on hips. "The cost in bendalloy would be incredible. With one nugget worth about five hundred notes, Wayne can compress about two minutes into fifteen external seconds. To compress time equal to five minutes on the outside—gaining you enough time on the inside to move all of those iron bars—you'd need to spend *ten thousand* notes. The bars would be worth just a fraction of that; Harmony, you could buy your own *train* for that kind of money. I don't believe it. Something else is happening here."

"Machinery of some sort," Marasi said.

Wax nodded, walking down the hillside, scanning the ground. "Let's see if we can find any traces they may have left behind. Maybe the machinery had wheels that left ruts or tracks."

Wayne shoved his hands in his pockets and walked about, making a show of looking, but the whole reason he'd come to get Waxillium involved in this investigation was because he was good at this kind of stuff. If there were people involved, Wayne was quite handy. But flowers and dirt … not so much.

After a few minutes, Wayne was bored, so he wandered over to where Marasi was looking. She glanced at him. "I do have to say, Wayne … that hat *does not* fit you very well."

"Yeah. I just want to keep reminding Wax he owes me a new one."

"Why? You were the one who let the man take your old one from you."

"He convinced me not to fight back," Wayne grumbled. Seemed obvious to him. "And then, he *shot* the guy wearing it, and the guy walked away!"

"He couldn't have known the man would survive."

"He shoulda grabbed my hat," Wayne said.

She smiled, looking bemused.

Most people, they didn't understand hats, and Wayne didn't really blame them. Until you'd had a good, lucky hat, you wouldn't understand the value of it. "It's actually all right," Wayne said softly, kicking around in the weeds. "But don't tell Wax."

"What?"

"I *needed* to lose that hat," Wayne admitted. "Otherwise, it would have been blown up in the explosion, see? It was lucky it got stolen. It could have ended up like my duster."

"You're a very unique individual, Wayne."

"Technically, we all are," he said. Then he hesitated. "Except for twins, I guess. Anyway, there's something I've been wanting to ask you. It's a little personal, though."

"How personal?" she asked.

"Well, you know, about yourself and all. The personal kind of personal. I guess."

She looked at him, frowning, then blushed. Seemed the girl did that a lot, which was just fine by Wayne. Girls were pretty with a bit of color on them. “You don’t mean about me … and you … I mean…”

“Oh, Harmony!” Wayne laughed. “It’s not anythin’ like that, mate. Don’t worry. You’re pretty enough, particularly through the coppers, if you know what I mean.”

“The coppers?”

“Sure. Word with a lot of curves, like you. You have a pretty accent too, and some nice bounce to you in the cloud area.”

“Dare I ask what that is?”

“The white, puffy things that float high above the fruitful land where the seeds are planted.”

She blushed even further. “Wayne! That might be the most crude thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“I strives for excellence, mate. I strives for excellence. But don’t worry—like I said, you’re right nice, but you ain’t got enough punch for me. I like women what could take my face *clean* off with a good roundhouse.”

“You prefer women who could beat you up?”

“Sure. It’s a thing. Anyway, what I was talkin’ about was your Allomancy. See, you and I, we have opposite powers. I speed up time, you slow it. So what happens if we *both* use it at the same time? Eh?”

“It’s been documented,” Marasi said. “They cancel one another out. Nothing happens.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Huh,” he said, wiping his nose with his handkerchief. “Most expensive ‘nothing’ a person could find, what with us both burning rare metals.”

“I don’t know,” she said with a sigh. “My power is pretty good at doing nothing on its own. I don’t think I really understood how pathetic being a Pulser was until I saw what your power could do.”

“Oh, yours ain’t so bad.”

“Wayne, any time I use my ability—*any* time—I’ll be left frozen in place, looking stupid while everyone else is able to run about. You can use your power to gain extra time. I can only use mine to lose time.”

“Sure, but maybe sometime you want a certain day to come along sooner. You want it real badly, right? So you can burn some chromium, and poof, it’s here!”

"I've…" She looked embarrassed. "I've actually done that. Chromium burns way more slowly than bendalloy."

"See! Advantages. How big can your bubbles get?"

"I can make one the size of a small room."

"That's *way* bigger than mine," Wayne said.

"Multiply zero by a thousand, and you still get zero."

He hesitated. "You do?"

"Er, yes," she said. "It's basic mathematics."

"I thought we were talking about Allomancy. When did it become about mathematics?"

That made her blush too. You expected that out of a girl when you talked about her more attractive body parts, but not when you mentioned mathematics. She was an odd alloy, this one.

She glanced to the side, toward Waxillium. He was crouching down beside the canal.

"Now *him,*" Wayne said. "*He* likes 'em smart."

"I have no intentions toward Lord Ladrian," she said quickly. Too quickly.

"Pity," Wayne said. "I think he likes you, mate."

That might have been an exaggeration. Wayne wasn't certain what Wax was thinking in regards to Marasi—however, the man needed to get his mind off Lessie. Lessie had been a great girl. Wonderful, and all that. But she was dead, and Wax still had that … hollow look to him. The same one he'd displayed in the weeks after Lessie's death. It was softer now, but still there.

A new love would help a lot. Wayne was certain of it, so he found himself quite pleased with himself as Marasi started moving, eventually wandering over to where Wax was working. She touched his arm, and he pointed at something on the ground beside the canal. Together, they inspected it.

Wayne strolled over.

"… perfectly rectangular," Marasi was saying. "From something mechanical."

The ground here was pressed down as if by something heavy in a square patch. It was apparently the only kind of track in the area, and didn't seem what Wax had been intending to find. He knelt beside it, frowning, and pressed his hand into the dirt, probably to check how compact it was. He looked up at the tracks again.

"Not enough footprints," Wax said softly. "There's no way this was carried out with manpower. Even if there was a speed-bubble."

"I think you're right," Marasi said. "If the robbery happened right there, a machine could have remained in the canal and still reached the tracks."

Waxillium stood and dusted his hands off. "Let's head back. I need time to think."

* * *

Waxillium walked down the center of the passenger car, hands wet from scrubbing them in the washroom. The car thumped beneath him, fields speeding by outside.

Where would Miles be hiding? Waxillium's mind went in loops. The City offered too many places to hide, and Miles wasn't a typical criminal. He was a former lawkeeper. Waxillium's normal instincts would be off.

He'll want to scale back, Waxillium decided. *He's careful. Judicious. He spent months between stealing the aluminum and making his next robbery.*

Miles had lost men and resources. He'd hide for a time. But *where*? Waxillium leaned against the corridor wall. This first-class railcar was made up of private compartments. He could faintly hear people talking in the one beside him. Children. It had been a long walk through six railcars to find the one with an available washroom. Wayne and Marasi were in a compartment several cars farther along.

If Marasi was right about the intended function of the kidnapped women, then a grim fate awaited them. Miles could afford to step back, let the trail grow cold. Each hour delayed would make him that much more difficult to find.

No, Waxillium thought. *He'll need one more heist.* A quick one, perhaps without any hostages, to get more aluminum. Waxillium had looked over the original theft reports, and had managed to make an accurate assessment of the amount of aluminum Tekiel had been smuggling. It would have barely been enough to outfit thirty or forty men. That would leave Miles needing one more heist before going to ground; that way, he could use the downtime to make more guns and ammunition.

That left Waxillium with one more opportunity to catch him. If he could set it up right. He—

The scream was faint, but Waxillium had trained himself to be vigilant for such things. Always alert, especially when he was busy thinking. He immediately threw himself to the side, which saved his life as the bullet ripped through the glass window at the end of the railcar.

Waxillium twisted, pulling a revolver from its holster. A figure in black stood in the next car, looking through the broken window. He wore the mask again, eyes exposed, knit covering the rest of his features. The build was right, though—and the height, even the way he held his gun.

Idiot! Waxillium thought. His instincts *had* been off. An ordinary criminal would have gone to ground. But not Miles. He was a former lawman, accustomed to hunting rather than being hunted.

And if you caused a twist in his plans, he'd come looking for you.

the certainty that their valued cargo may travel unmolested along the lines of the Elendel Basin and the lands beyond.

stepped forward once again with an ingenious solution that takes an active hand in battling these villains.

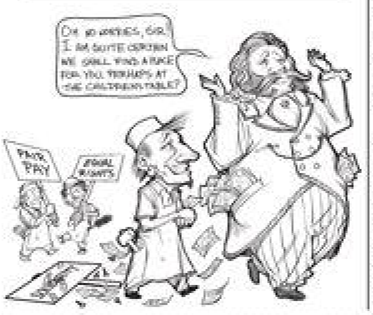
insight as to what the phantoms may desire. Exclusive reporting, only found here! Reverse side.

Union Leader Abandons Solidarity with Trade Union Party Members

In a surprise switch from party line position, Trade Union Leader Elors Durnsed announced his intention to set aside any objection to the closure of further negotiations between representatives of the United Tradeworkers Union and the Noble Houses Collective in their ongoing agreement disputes. Rumors of a series of secret meetings taking place between the Union Leader and private citizens whose interests are aligned with the Houses remain a matter of speculation, with all questions on the matter brushed aside.

The announcement was greeted with near-violent derision from members of the Trade Union Party interviewed by this broadsheet. A Line Riveter at the site of the Ironspine Building who gave his name as Brill told this reporter that Mr. Durnsed should "bloody well keep his head clear of these parts if he knows what's what." Before he could expand upon this statement, his local union representative intervened and gave assurances that the man was speaking metaphorically. However, the mood of the assembled Line Riveters and Shovelmen was decidedly against Mr. Durnsed.

The decision by the Union Leader means that the contract as written holds now through the remainder of the financial quarter. Subsequent to this revelation, industry stocks were trading generally higher, and even recently depressed Tekiel shares began to show positive activity.


OH, NO WORRIES, SIR! I AM QUITE CERTAIN WE SHALL FIND A PLACE FOR YOU. PERHAPS AT THE CHILDREN'S TABLE?
FAIR PAY
EQUAL RIGHTS

RELIEF FROM YOUR PAINS!

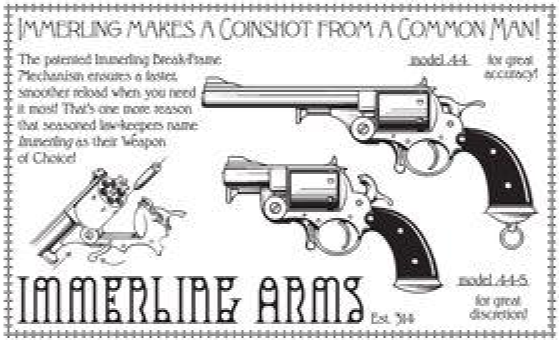
Mistress Halex, Allomancer, has opened a new Soothing Parlor. Within its relaxing confines, one can find relief from stress, anxiety, and concern—leaving with a light heart and a soaring mind. Our reporter visits the parlor to give a detailed report of what goes on. A luxurious massage, sweet scents, and a Soother on duty to give a unique "Emotional Massage" leave you feeling as good on the inside as you do on the outside. Read the report on the back, column seven.

Feltri Proven to Be Rioter!

Alloran Feltri, long favored to win the Canalworkers 2nd Seat in this fall's elections, is rumored to have been using Allomantic abilities to create supporters. In a scandal sure to rock the city to its foundations, a former mistress has come forward to expose all. Complete story on reverse side, third column.

Allomancers for Hire.

All varieties. Coinshots, Pewterarms for industrial work or protection. Temporal Allomancers for time manipulation. Soothers, Rioters for dinner party amusement. Some Feruchemists available with advance warning. Metalurgistics Allied, Carronberry Square, 7th Oct. Are you Metalborn and wish to earn what you deserve? Call in person; ask for Jarrington.



IMMERLING MAKES A COINSHOT FROM A COMMON MAN!

The patented Immerling Break-Frame Mechanism ensures a faster, smoother reload when you need it most! That's one more reason that seasoned law-keepers name *Immerling* as their Weapon of Choice!

model 44 for great accuracy!

model 44-S for great discretion!

IMMERLING ARMS Est. 314

Exploring the Pits of Eltania!

My dear editor, and by way of you, my dearest readers: I trust that my missive finds you well and in the possession of a willing ear, for the incredible events that transpired in my recent experience may strike you with incredulity and shock. I vow to you in earnest assertion that each and every word I write to you is true and factual. I live these tales so that you may learn of the Roughs and the fascinating people who live out here beyond the mountains, beyond the law, and beyond cultured reason.

When I wrote my previous missive, I was certain that my end had come. Indeed, I was captured and held by the brute koloss of the Pits of Eltania, and had been told that on the morrow, I would be executed and my flesh feasted upon. I feared a gruesome end, and I will admit that I found myself in earnest prayer to the Survivor that very night! If anyone needed the protection of He Who Lived, it was I!

You may assume from my writing here that I have escaped. Well, in part that is true; but I have not left the camp of the blue-skinned koloss. Indeed, I write you this letter from the very chamber where I was held to be executed on that night. Only now, it is not a prison, but instead a grand palace! At least, so do the savages holding me consider it. To me, it remains merely a mud-floored hut. Sleeping beneath the stars would be more preferable, especially if I could have had Miss Dramali by my side. But my quest to locate where she has been taken will need to wait for later.

The koloss do try to make my accommodations fit. They have brought me dead animals to feast upon, and have built me a fire, a sign that they consider me worthy of grand attention. And they have given me several weapons of their own construction. As I have mentioned before, those weapons are of incredibly fine make. I had thought creatures such as

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Waxillium didn’t have time to raise his weapon. He instantly increased his weight and flared his steel as he Pushed forward on the doors between the railcars. The glass windows exploded as the doors bent and ripped free, blocking the bullets as Miles fired three times in quick succession.

The car lurched as the train began a turn. Heads popped out of compartments, wide eyes searching for the cause of the noise. Miles again took aim down the corridor at Waxillium. Children nearby were crying.

I can’t risk bystanders, Waxillium thought. *I have to get out.*

As the gun fired, Waxillium threw himself forward. A bullet ricocheted near his head, spraying sparks. He couldn’t sense it Allomantically. It was aluminum.

Waxillium burst out into the space between railcars, wind roaring and tugging on his clothing. As Miles fired his sixth shot, Waxillium Pushed on the couplers below and launched himself upward.

He soared into the air above the railcars. The wind caught him, pushing him backward as he fell. He landed with a thump on the roof several cars to the rear, going down on one knee and steadying himself with his free hand, wind blasting his hair and catching his jacket. He raised his revolver.

Miles was here. On the train.

I could stop him now. End this.

The next thought was immediate. How in the *world* was he going to stop Miles Hundredlives?

A masked figure rose between the train cars just ahead—maybe only ten feet away—holding a big-bore pistol. Miles always had preferred firepower to accuracy. He’d once said that he’d rather miss a few times knowing that when he *did* hit, the person he shot wouldn’t be getting up again.

Waxillium cursed and filled his metalmind, dropping his weight to almost nothing, then rolled to the right, off the roof and over the side of the railcar. Gunshots followed. He grabbed the rim of a window, pressing himself against the side of the car and wedging one foot down into a slot in the metal along the car's side. His decreased weight allowed him to hold himself there easily, though his light body was buffeted by the wind.

Far ahead, the engine belched cinders and black smoke; below, the tracks were a-thunder. Waxillium raised his revolver in his right hand and waited as he clung to the side of the car with one hand and leg.

Miles's masked head soon poked out between the cars. Waxillium fired a single quick shot, Pushing the bullet forward with Allomancy for extra speed against the howling wind. He nailed Miles right in the left eye socket. The man's head snapped backward, and blood sprayed against the side of the railcar behind him. He stumbled, and Waxillium shot again, hitting him in the forehead.

The man reached up and ripped off his mask, revealing a hawk-like face with short black hair and prominent eyebrows. It *was* him. Miles. A lawkeeper, a man who should have known better. A Twinborn Compounder of awesome power. His eye grew back, and the head wound was gone in an eyeblink. Golden metal glimmered on his arms, deep within the sleeves. His metalminds; they were spikes he wore driven through the skin of his lower arm, like bolts. Metal that pierced skin was extremely difficult to touch with Steelpushing.

Rust and Ruin! Even getting shot in the *eye* hadn't slowed him much. Waxillium sighted on an approaching tree and fired, then let go of the train and made himself as light as he could. He blew backward in the wind, and as the tree whipped past, he Pushed on the bullet lodged in it, shoving himself to the side, between two train cars. He crouched there, gasping, heart pounding as another of Miles's bullets ricocheted off the corner near him.

How did you fight someone who was virtually immortal?

Skirting some low hills, the railway rounded another curve. Verdant farms and placid orchards rolled past in the near distance. Waxillium grabbed the car's ladder and pulled himself up, carefully peeking over the edge of the roof.

Miles was charging toward him at full speed along the top of the railcar. Waxillium cursed, raising his gun as Miles did the same. Waxillium got his shot off first, and managed to hit Miles, who was only a few steps away by that point.

Waxillium aimed for the gun hand.

The bullet ripped into the flesh and bone, causing Miles to curse, dropping his gun. The weapon bounced once on the roof, then disappeared over the side. Waxillium smiled in satisfaction. Miles growled, then leaped forward off the top of the railcar and slammed into him.

Waxillium's head cracked back against the metal behind him, pain sending a flash of white across his vision. He grunted, dazed. *Idiot!* Most men would never have jumped like that; it was too likely to toss both of them off the moving train. That wouldn't bother Miles.

They had both fallen into the space between railcars, standing on the precarious footing there. Miles grabbed Waxillium by the vest with both hands, lifting him and slamming him back against the railcar behind. Waxillium reflexively fired again and again into Miles's gut at point-blank range, but the bullets ripped out of Miles's back without even giving him pause. He pulled Waxillium forward and punched him across the face.

Pain flashed, and Waxillium's vision swam. He almost stumbled off and fell onto the speeding tracks just below. Desperate, Waxillium tried to Push himself up into the air. Miles was ready for this, and as soon as Waxillium started to rise, the other man hooked his foot under the bottom ladder rung and held on. Waxillium lurched, still feeling dazed, but didn't go into the air. He Pushed harder, but Miles hung on, eyes determined.

"You can rip the tendons in my foot, Wax," Miles yelled over the racket of wheels on the rails below and the howl of the wind, "but they'll reknit immediately. I think your body will give out before mine does. Push harder. Let's see what happens."

Waxillium let go, dropping back to the landing between cars. He tried to grab Miles in a headlock as he came down, but the other man was younger, faster, and a better brawler. Miles ducked—still holding on to Waxillium's vest—then pulled. Waxillium stumbled, off balance, as he lurched into Miles, who drove his fist into Waxillium's gut.

Waxillium gasped at the pain. Miles grabbed Waxillium on the shoulder and pulled him forward, moving to bury his fist in Waxillium's belly again.

So Waxillium increased his weight tenfold.

Miles stumbled, suddenly pulling against something incredibly heavy. His eyes went wide. He was used to dealing with Coinshots—they were one of the most common types of Allomancer, particularly among criminals. Feruchemists were far more rare. Miles knew what Waxillium was, but knowing about a power and anticipating it were different things.

Still aching and breathless from the punch, Waxillium threw his shoulder into Miles's chest, using his enormous weight to press Miles backward. The man cursed, then let go of Wax and swung away, quickly climbing up the ladder back to the railcar's roof.

Wax stopped tapping his metalmind and Pushed, throwing himself upward. He landed on the other car, facing Miles across the small gap. Wind played with their clothing and fields passed on either side. The train swayed as it crossed a switch, and the unsteady footing made Waxillium wobble. He bent down on one knee, pressing one hand against the rooftop and increasing his weight to steady himself. Miles stood tall, obviously indifferent to the shaky footing.

Indistinctly, Waxillium could hear people crying out, probably as they moved into other cars, trying to get away from the fighting. With luck the disturbance would draw Wayne.

Miles reached for the gun at his other hip. Waxillium reached for his other gun as well; he'd dropped the first—the better of the two—in the fighting. His vision was still fuzzy, his heart racing, but he still got his gun leveled at almost exactly the same instant as Miles. Each fired.

A bullet grazed Wax's side, cutting through his coat and drawing blood. His own shot took Miles in the kneecap, making him stumble, knocking his next shot wild. Wax took careful aim, then shot Miles in the hand, again blasting apart flesh and bone. Miles's body immediately began to regrow itself, bone reassembling, sinew springing back like rubber, skin appearing like ice growing over a pond. But the gun dropped.

Miles reached for it. Wax casually lowered his gun and shot the other weapon, knocking it backward and off the shaking top of the train.

"Dammit!" Miles swore. "Do you know how much those things are worth?"

Still on one knee, Wax raised his gun beside his head, the wind of the train's motion blowing the smoke away from the barrel.

Miles rose to his feet again. "You know, Wax," he yelled over the wind, "I used to wonder if I'd have to face you. A part of me always thought your softness would cause it—I thought you'd let someone go that you shouldn't have. I wondered if I'd have a chance to hunt you down for it."

Waxillium didn’t respond. He maintained a level gaze, face impassive. On the inside, he was smarting, trying to catch his breath from the beating he’d taken. He raised his hand to his side, pressing it against the wound. Blessedly, it wasn’t too bad, but it still wet his fingers with blood. The train swayed, and he quickly lowered his hand to the rooftop again.

“What was it that broke you, Miles?” Waxillium called. “The lure of wealth?”

“You know very well this isn’t about money.”

“You need gold,” Waxillium yelled. “Don’t deny it. You’ve always needed it, for your constant Compounding.”

Miles didn’t reply.

“What happened?” Waxillium yelled. “You were a lawkeeper, Miles. A damn good one.”

“I was a dog, Wax. A hound, kept in line with false promises and stern orders.” Miles backed up a few paces, then ran forward, leaping over the gap between them.

Waxillium stood warily and backed up.

“Don’t tell me you never felt it,” Miles yelled, snarling. “You worked *every day* to fix the world, Wax. You tried to end the pain, the violence, the robberies. It never worked. The more men you put down, the more troubles arose.”

“It’s the life of a lawkeeper,” Waxillium said. “If you gave up, fine. But you didn’t have to join the other side.”

“I was already *on* the other side,” Miles said. “Where do the criminals come from? Was it the shopkeeper next door who started rampaging and murdering? Was it the boys who grew up near town, working their father’s dry farm?

“No. It was the mine workers, shipped out from the City to dig into the depths and exploit the latest rich find—then be abandoned once it was exhausted. It was the fortune hunters. It was the rich fools from the City who wanted adventure.”

“I don’t care who it was,” Waxillium said, still backing up. He was on the next-to-last car. He was running out of space to retreat. “I served the law.”

“I served it too,” Miles called. “But now I serve something better. The essence of the law, but mixed with real justice. An alloy, Wax. The best parts of both made into one. I do something better than chase the filth sent to me from the city.

"You can't tell me you never noticed it. What of Pars the Deadman, your 'great catch' of the last five years? I remember you hunting him, I remember your nights without sleep, your anxiety. The blood on the dirt in the center of Weathering when he left old Burlow's daughter dead for you to find. Where did *he* come from?"

Waxillium didn't reply. Pars had been a murderer from the City, a butcher who had been caught killing beggars. He'd fled out into the Roughs, and there he had again worked to sate his grisly obsession.

"They didn't stop him," Miles spat, stepping forward. "They didn't send you help. They didn't care about the Roughs. Nobody cares about the Roughs—they barely seem to notice us save as a place to deposit their trash."

"So you rob them," Wax called. "Kidnap their daughters, murder any who stand in your way?"

Miles took another step forward. "I do what needs to be done, Wax. Isn't that the code of the lawkeeper? I haven't stopped being one; you never stop being a lawkeeper. It gets in you. You do what nobody else will. You stand up for the downtrodden, make things better, stop the criminals. Well, I've just decided to set my sights on a more powerful brand of criminal."

Waxillium shook his head. "You've let yourself become a monster, Miles."

"You say that," Miles said, wind whipping at his short hair, "but your eyes, Wax … they show the truth. I can see it. You *do* get what I'm saying. You've felt it too. You *know* that I'm right."

"I'm not going to join you."

"I'm not asking you to," Miles said, voice growing softer. "You've always been the good hound, Wax. If your master beats you, you just whimper and wonder how to better serve. I don't think we'd work well together. Not in this."

Miles lunged forward.

Waxillium dumped all of his weight into his metalmind and hopped backward, letting the wind grab and drag him a good twenty feet away. He increased his weight and landed on the last railcar. They were approaching the suburbs; the flora of the Outer Estates dwindled.

"Go ahead and run!" Miles called. "I'll just wander back and take little Lady Harms the bastard! And Wayne. I've long been wanting an excuse to put a bullet in that man's head." He turned and began to stroll in the other direction.

Waxillium cursed, dashing forward. Miles turned, his lips spreading in a cold smile. He reached down, pulling a long-bladed knife out of the back of his boot. It was aluminum; he didn't have a single Allomantically reactive piece of metal on his body that Waxillium could see.

I need to throw him off the train, Wax thought. He couldn't beat Miles here, not for good. He needed a more controlled environment. And he needed time to plan.

As he got close, Wax raised his gun and tried to blast the knife out of Miles's hand—but the other man spun the knife and rammed it through his own left forearm, jamming it right down through the flesh so it stuck out the bottom. He didn't even flinch. Stories told all around the Roughs claimed that after suffering hundreds of wounds that should have killed him, Miles had grown completely oblivious to pain.

Miles held his hands out, ready to grab Waxillium—but he'd also be able to whip out that knife in a flash. Waxillium got out his own knife and held it in his left hand. The two circled for a moment, Wax's increased weight helping to steady him atop the thumping train car. It still wasn't terribly sure footing, and sweat trickled down his brow, blown sideways by the wind.

A few fools poked their heads up between distant cars, trying to watch the action. Unfortunately, none of those fools was Wayne. Wax feinted forward with a quick step, but Miles didn't take the bait. Wax was only a fair knife fighter, and Miles was known as one of the best. But if Wax could roll them both off the train …

At this speed, it will end me, but not him, he thought. *Unless I can get a Push underneath me. Rusts. This is going to be hard.*

He had only one chance, and that was to end the fight quickly.

Miles came in to seize him. Wax took a breath and stepped into it, which Miles seemed to find surprising, though he still managed to grab Wax's arm. With his other hand, Miles pulled the knife free from his own arm, preparing to thrust it toward Wax. In desperation, Wax increased his weight and threw his shoulder into Miles's chest.

Unfortunately, Miles anticipated that move. He dropped to the roof, rolling, and kicked Wax in the legs.

In the blink of an eye, Wax was tumbling through the air toward the gravel and rock beside the railway tracks. Some primal part of him knew what to do. He Pushed on the knife in his hand, ripping it free and plunging it into the earth directly below him. That bounced him into the air as he simultaneously shed his weight. The wind caught him. He was spinning, and he lost all sense of direction.

He hit and rolled into a heap, slamming against something hard. He stopped moving, but his vision continued to lurch. The sky spun.

All grew still. His vision slowly returned to normal. He was alone in the middle of a weedy field. The train was puffing away down the tracks.

He groaned and rolled over. *A man my age shouldn't be doing this kind of thing,* he thought, stumbling to his feet. He hadn't started feeling his age until the last few years, but he was over forty now. That was ancient by Roughs standards.

He stared after the escaping railway train, shoulder aching. The thing was, Miles had said one thing that was right.

You never stopped being a lawkeeper.

Wax gritted his teeth and dashed forward. He scooped up the gun he'd dropped when falling—it was easy to find with his Allomancy—then jumped without breaking stride and landed atop the tracks.

He Pushed, throwing himself into the air. He reached a good height, then Shoved on the rails behind him, shooting forward. A careful Push below, a continuous Push behind. The wind roared around him, his clothing a noisy flurry, blood seeping from the wound at his side.

There was a thrill to this, the flight of a Coinshot. It was a freedom no other Allomancer could know. When the air became his, he felt the same exhilaration he had years ago, when he'd first sought his fortune in the Roughs. He wished that he were wearing his mistcoat and that the mists were around him. Everything always seemed to work better in the mists. They were said to protect the just.

He caught up to the train in moments, then threw himself in a powerful arc over it. A small figure was walking along the tops of the railcars, making his way toward Wayne and Marasi.

Wax Pushed downward to keep himself from hitting too hard, but increased his weight at the same time, slamming into the train's roof and denting it into a crater around him. He stood up straight, then flipped his revolver open, as if to reload. The casings and unspent rounds flipped up into the air and he caught one.

Miles spun. Wax tossed the cartridge at him.

Looking startled, Miles snatched it out of the air.

"Goodbye," Wax said, then slammed as powerful a Push as he could into that cartridge.

Miles's eyes opened wide. His hand jerked backward into his chest, and then he was flung free of the train, the Push on the cartridge effectively transferred to him. The train rounded a bend as Miles soared through the air and crashed into the rocky ground beyond.

Wax sat down, then lay back, eyes toward the sky. He breathed in deeply, aching, and pressed his hand to the wound at his side. He rode all the way to the next stop before climbing down.

* * *

"We had orders, m'lord," the railway engineer said. "Even when I heard there was gunfire back in the passenger cars. We ain't to stop for *anything*. The Vanishers get you when you stop."

"It is just as well," Waxillium said, gladly taking a cup of water from a young man in an apprentice engineer's vest. "If you had stopped, it likely would have meant my death."

He sat in a small room at the station, which—by tradition—was owned and operated by a minor member of the house that owned the land nearby. The lord himself was out, but the steward had immediately sent for the local surgeon.

Waxillium had his coat, vest, and shirt off, and was holding a bandage to his side. He wasn't certain he had time to wait for that surgeon. It would take Miles about an hour of running to reach this station. Fortunately, he wasn't a steel Feruchemist, capable of increasing his speed.

An hour, likely, but it was best to plan for the worst. If Miles found a horse, he could arrive sooner. And Waxillium wasn't certain exactly how Miles's Compounding would affect his stamina. Perhaps he might be capable of running longer distances than he should be able to.

"We almost have your men out, m'lord," another apprentice said, entering. "Those locks aren't supposed to be this hard to open!"

Waxillium drank his water. Miles had planned his trap well. Wayne and Marasi had been confined in their car—along with all the others who happened to be there—by lengths of metal jammed into locking mechanisms on the outer doors. Miles had waited until Waxillium left his room, then had quietly trapped the others before hunting him.

There was some luck to that, at least. Miles hadn't simply killed them. It made sense that he hadn't, however. It would have been risky, going in to try to kill Wayne—who could heal himself—and risk drawing Waxillium back, then facing one on either side. Miles was too careful for that. Waxillium had been the real target. The others were better locked away until the primary goal was accomplished.

"You need to get your train going again," Waxillium said to the engineer. He was a heavyset man with a dark brown beard and a flat-topped cap. "You are in danger from the Vanishers. We need to ride the train all the way into the heart of the City. We can't delay."

"But your wound, m'lord!"

"It will be fine," Waxillium said. Out in the Roughs, he'd often had to go days or weeks with a wound before a surgeon could tend it.

"We—"

The door burst open and Marasi stumbled through. Her blue dress was still singed from the explosion at the mansion, but she wore it well, despite the folds of lace underneath the glistening outer layer. The blue vest that pulled closed around the bodice was missing a button on the bottom, probably ripped free in the fall. He hadn't noticed that before.

She raised her hands to her mouth at the sight of the bloody bandage, then immediately turned beet red at seeing him with his shirt off. He did have a moment of pride in the fact that, though he had some gray in his hair, he still had the lean muscles of a much younger man.

"Oh, *Harmony*!" she said. "Are you all right? Is that your blood? And should I be in here? I can go. I should probably go, shouldn't I? Are you sure you're all right?"

"He'll live," Wayne said, peeking in behind her. "Wha'd you do, Wax? Trip on the way out of the washroom?"

"Miles found me," Waxillium said, removing the bandage. It looked like the wound had mostly stopped bleeding. He took another bandage from one of the apprentices, then prepared to tie it in place.

"Is he dead?" Marasi asked.

"I killed him a few more times," Waxillium said, "and it was about as effective as what everyone else has tried."

"You need to get his metalminds off of 'im," Wayne said. "It's the only way."

"He keeps thirty different ones," Waxillium said, "all piercing his skin, all with enough healing to bring him back from practically any wound." A Pewterarm, or even a lesser Bloodmaker like Wayne, could be killed with a direct shot to the head. Miles could heal so quickly even that wouldn't kill him. He was said to keep the healing running constantly. From what Waxillium knew of Compounding, it could be very dangerous to stop once you'd started.

"Sounds like a challenge!" Wayne said.

Marasi lingered in the doorway for a moment longer, then apparently made a decision and rushed forward. "Let me see the wound," she said, kneeling beside Waxillium's bench.

He frowned, but stopped tying the bandage straps and let her peel back the cloth. She inspected the wound.

"You know something of surgery, m'lady?" the engineer said, shifting from foot to foot. He seemed a little anxious at her presence in the room.

"I go to university," she said.

Ah, that's right, Waxillium thought.

"So?" Wayne asked.

Marasi prodded at the wound. "University rules, set by Harmony himself, dictate a broad education."

"Yeah, I know they have to take girls," Wayne said.

Marasi paused. "Er … not that meaning of broad, Wayne."

"Students have to be trained in a little of everything," Waxillium said, "before they can choose a specialty."

"That includes basic healing and some small amount of surgery," Marasi said. "As well as complete anatomy courses."

Wayne frowned. "Wait. Anatomy. Meaning, *all* parts of anatomy."

Marasi blushed. "Yes."

"So—"

"So it was very popular in class to watch my reactions, apparently," she said, still blushing. "And I'd rather not dwell on that at the moment, Wayne, thank you. This needs stitches, Waxillium."

"Can you do it?"

"Er … I've never worked on anyone *alive* before…"

"Eh," Wayne said, "I spent *months* training with dueling canes on dummies before beating up my first real person. It's pretty much the same thing."

"I'll be all right, Marasi," Waxillium said.

"So many scars," she said quietly, as if not noticing what he'd said. She was staring at his chest and sides, and seemed to be counting the old bullet wounds.

"There are seven," he said softly in reply, replacing the bandage and tying it tight.

"You've been shot *seven* times?" she asked.

"A lot of gunshots aren't lethal, if you know how to care for them," Waxillium said. "They don't really—"

"Oh," she said, raising a hand to her lips. "I meant, we only have records of five. I really will need to hear about the other two sometime."

"Right," he said, grimacing and standing. He waved for his shirt.

"Oh, bother," she said. "That didn't come out very well, did it? I really am impressed that you have been shot so often. Really."

"Getting hit's not really that impressive," Wayne noted. "It don't take much skill to get shot. It's *avoiding* the bullets that's tough."

Waxillium snorted, pulling his arm through a sleeve.

Marasi stood. "I'll turn around so you can dress," she said, beginning to spin.

"Turn around," Waxillium said flatly.

"Um, yes."

"So I can dress."

"A little silly, I guess."

"A little," he said, smiling and pulling his other sleeve on. He began doing the buttons. Wayne looked so amused he was having trouble standing up.

"All right," she said, raising her hands to the sides of her face. "I *realize* that I get a little flustered sometimes. I'm just not used to things exploding, people getting shot at, and finding my friends sitting and bleeding with their shirts off when I walk in! This is all very new to me."

"It's all right," Waxillium said, laying a hand on her shoulder. "There are much worse things to be than genuine, Marasi. Besides, Wayne wasn't much better when he was new to all of this. Why, he used to get so nervous that he would start—"

“Hey,” Wayne said, “no use bringin’ *that* up.”

“What?” Marasi asked, lowering her hands.

“NOTHING,” Wayne replied. “Come on. We should move, right? If Mister Miles Murderer is still alive, he’ll be wanting to shoot us, right? And as good as Wax is at getting shot—he’s had lots of practice, you see—I think we best be avoiding more of that sort today.”

“He’s right,” Waxillium said, pulling on his vest, then putting on his shoulder holsters. He winced.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” Marasi asked.

“He’s fine,” Wayne said, holding the door open for them. *“I* got quite near my entire rusted back blown off earlier, if you’ll kindly recall, and I didn’t hear nearly an ounce of the sympathy you’re showin’ him.”

“That’s different,” Marasi said, walking past him.

“What? Why? ’Cuz I can heal?”

“No,” she said, “because—even after knowing you only a short time—I’m fairly certain that on one level or another, you deserve to get blown up every now and again.”

“Oi,” Wayne said. “That’s harsh.”

“But untrue?” Waxillium said, pulling on his coat. It was looking quite ragged.

“Didn’t say that now, did I,” Wayne said, and sneezed. “Keep moving, slowboy. Rusts! A man gets shot, and he thinks he can take all afternoon. Let’s move!”

Waxillium walked past. He forced himself to smile, though he was starting to feel as ragged as his coat. There wasn’t much time. Miles had taken off his mask, but had obviously expected to kill Waxillium. He now knew that he’d been outed, and that would make him even more dangerous.

If Miles and his people were going to strike for more aluminum, they’d do it soon. Tonight, probably, assuming there was a shipment. Waxillium expected one soon; he’d read something in the broadsheets about House Tekiel boasting of their new armored freight cars.

“So what do we do when we get back?” Wayne asked softly as they walked toward the railway car. “We’re going to need someplace safe to plan, right?”

Waxillium sighed, knowing what Wayne was fishing for. “You’re probably right.”

Wayne smiled.

“You know,” Waxillium said, “I’m not sure I’d call any place near Ranette ‘safe.’ Particularly if you are there.”

“Better than being exploded,” Wayne said happily. “Mostly.”

14

Waxillium pounded on the door of the townhome. The area around them was a typical Elendel neighborhood. Vibrant, lush walnut trees lined either side of the cobbled street. Even after seven months back in the city, the trees still made him stare. Out in the Roughs, trees as large as these were rare. And here was an entire street full of them, mostly ignored by the inhabitants.

He, Wayne, and Marasi stood on the porch of the narrow, brick-faced home. Before Waxillium had a chance to lower his hand, the door swung open. A lean, long-legged woman stood inside. Her dark hair was pulled back into a shoulder-length tail, and she wore brown trousers and a Roughs-style long leather coat over a white, no-nonsense laced shirt. She took one look at Waxillium and Wayne, then slammed the door shut without saying a word.

Waxillium glanced at Wayne, and then they both took a step to the side. Marasi looked at them in confusion until Waxillium took her by the arm and pulled her over.

The door slammed back open, and the woman shoved a shotgun out. She glanced around the corner at the two of them, then narrowed her eyes.

"I'll count to ten," she said. "One."

"Now, Ranette," Waxillium began.

"Two three four five," she said in quick succession.

"Do we really have to—"

"Six seven eight." She raised the gun, taking aim at them.

"All right then…" Waxillium said, hustling down the steps, Wayne following, hand holding his carriage man's cap in place.

"She wouldn't really shoot us?" Marasi asked softly. "Would she?"

"Nine!"

They reached the sidewalk beneath the towering trees. The door slammed closed behind them.

Waxillium took a deep breath, turning around and looking at the house. Wayne leaned back against one of the tree trunks, smiling.

“So, that went well,” Waxillium said.

“Yup,” Wayne replied.

“Well?” Marasi demanded.

“Neither of us got shot,” Waxillium said. “You can’t always be sure, with Ranette. Particularly if Wayne is along.”

“Now, that’s right unfair,” Wayne said. “She’s only shot me three times.”

“You’re forgetting Callingfale.”

“That was in the foot,” Wayne said. “Barely counts.”

Marasi pursed her lips, studying the building. “You two have some curious friends.”

“Curious? Nah, she’s just angry.” Wayne smiled. “It’s how she shows affection.”

“By shooting people?”

“Ignore Wayne,” Waxillium said. “Ranette might be brusque, but she rarely shoots people other than him.”

Marasi nodded. “So … should we go?”

“Wait for a moment,” Waxillium said. To his side, Wayne started whistling, then checked his pocket watch.

The door was flung open again, Ranette holding her shotgun up on her shoulder. “You’re not leaving!” she called.

“I need your help,” Waxillium called back.

“I need *you* to stick your head in a bucket of water and slowly count to a thousand!”

“Lives are at stake, Ranette,” Waxillium yelled. “Innocent lives.”

Ranette raised her gun, taking aim.

“Don’t worry,” Wayne said to Marasi. “At this distance, birdshot probably won’t be lethal. Make sure your eyes are closed, though.”

“You’re not helping, Wayne,” Waxillium said calmly. He was sure Ranette wouldn’t shoot. Well, reasonably sure. Maybe.

“Oh, you actually want me to help?” Wayne said. “Right. You still have that aluminum gun I gave you?”

“Tucked in the small of my back,” Waxillium said. “Without any bullets.”

“Hey, Ranette!” Wayne called. “I’ve got a neat gun you can have!”

She hesitated.

“Wait,” Waxillium said, “I wanted that—”

“Don’t be a baby,” Wayne said to him. “Ranette, it’s a revolver made entirely of aluminum!”

She lowered her shotgun. “Really?”

“Get it out,” Wayne whispered to Waxillium.

Waxillium sighed, reaching under his coat. He held up the revolver, drawing some looks from passersby on the street. Several of them spun about and hastened in the other direction.

Ranette stepped forward. She was a Lurcher, and could recognize most metals by simply burning iron. “Well then,” she called. “You should have *mentioned* that you’d brought a bribe. This might be enough to get me to forgive you!” She strolled down her front walk, shotgun slung up over her shoulder.

“You realize,” Waxillium said under his breath, “that this revolver is worth enough to buy an entire *houseful* of guns? I think *I* might shoot you, for this.”

“The ways of Wayne are mysterious and incomprehensible,” Wayne said. “What he giveth, he can draw back unto himself. And lo, let it be written and pondered.”

“You’ll ponder my fist, hitting your face.” Waxillium plastered a smile on his lips as Ranette stepped up to them; then he reluctantly handed over the revolver.

She looked it over with an expert eye. “Lightweight,” she said. “No maker’s mark stamped on the barrel or the grip. Where’d you get this?”

“The Vanishers,” Waxillium said.

“Who?”

Waxillium sighed. *That’s right.*

“How could you not know who the Vanishers are?” Marasi blurted. “They’ve been on every broadsheet in the city for the last two months. They’re all anyone is talking about.”

“People are stupid,” Ranette said, popping the revolver open, checking the chambers. “I find them annoying—and those are the ones I like. Did this have aluminum rounds too?”

Waxillium nodded. “We don’t have any of the pistol rounds. Just a few rifle rounds.”

"How did they work?" she asked. "Stronger than lead, but much lighter. Less immediate stopping power, obviously, but they'll still tear themselves apart on hitting. Could be very deadly if they hit the right spot. And that's assuming wind resistance doesn't slow the bullets too much before they reach their target. The effective range would be way down. And they'd be highly abrasive to the barrel."

"I haven't fired it," Waxillium said. He eyed Wayne, who was grinning. "We've … er, been saving it for you. And I'm sure the rounds are of a much heavier alloy than the revolver itself, though I didn't get a chance to test them yet. They're lighter than lead rounds, but not even close to as light as nearly pure aluminum would be. The percentage is still high, but the alloy must solve most of those issues somehow."

Ranette grunted. She waved the gun absently toward Marasi. "Who's the ornament?"

"A friend," Waxillium said. "Ranette, people are looking for us. Dangerous people. Can we come in?"

She tucked the revolver into her belt. "Fine. But if Wayne touches anything—*anything*—I'll blow off the offending fingers."

* * *

Marasi kept her tongue as they were led into the building. She wasn't particularly fond of being referred to as an "ornament." But she *was* fond of remaining unshot, and so silence seemed prudent.

She was good at silence. She had been trained to it over two decades of life.

Ranette closed the door behind them, then turned away. Shockingly, the locks on the door all *did themselves*, twisting in their mounts and clicking. There were nearly a dozen of them, and their sudden move caused Marasi to jump. *What in the Survivor's Deadly Name?*

Ranette set her shotgun in a basket beside the door—it appeared that she kept it there the way ordinary people kept umbrellas—then sidled past them in the narrow hallway. She waved a hand, and some kind of lever beside the interior door lurched. The door sprang open as she walked to it.

Ranette was an Allomancer. Of course. That was why she'd been able to recognize the aluminum. As they reached the door, Marasi studied the contraption that had opened it. There was a lever that could be pulled, which in turn moved a rope, pulley, and lever arrangement on the other side.

There's one on each side, Marasi realized as they stepped through the doorway. *She can open her doors from either direction without needing to lift a hand.* It seemed an indulgence. But, then, who was Marasi to critique another person's use of their Allomancy? This would certainly be useful if you often walked about with your hands full.

The living room beyond had been converted to a workshop. There were large worktables on all four sides, and nails had been pounded into the walls to hang an impressive variety of tools. Marasi didn't recognize any of the machinery that cluttered those tables, but there were a lot of clamps and gears. A disturbing number of electrical cords snaked across the floor.

Marasi stepped very carefully. Electricity couldn't be dangerous when it was in cords, could it? She'd heard stories of people getting burned, as if struck by lightning, from getting too close to electrical devices. And people spoke of using this power for everything—replacing horses with it, making mills that ground grain on their own, using it to power elevators. Disturbing. Well, she'd keep her distance.

The door slammed shut behind them in response to Ranette's Allomancy. She had to Pull on a lever for it, so that meant she was a Lurcher, not a Coinshot like Waxillium. Wayne was already poking through things on the desks, completely ignoring her threat to his fingers.

Waxillium surveyed the room, with its wires, windows—covered by shutters—and tools. "I assume it's living up to your expectations?"

"What?" Ranette asked. "The city? It's a pit. I don't feel half as safe here as I did out in the Roughs."

"Still can't believe you abandoned us," Wayne said, sounding hurt.

"You didn't have electricity," Ranette said, sitting at her desk in a chair with wheels on the bottom. She waved an absent hand, and a long, thin tool flipped out of a cubby on the wall. It flew toward her and she snatched it, then brought it down and began prodding at the gun Waxillium had given her. From what Marasi understood, gestures weren't needed for Pushing or Pulling, but many used them anyway.

Ranette completely ignored her visitors as she worked. She Pulled a few more tools without looking up, causing them to streak across the room to her. One nearly clipped Marasi on the shoulder.

It was unusual to see Allomancy used so casually, and Marasi wasn't certain what to make of it. On one hand, it was fascinating. On the other, it was humbling. What would it be like, to have a power that was *useful*? Lord Harms had insisted that Marasi keep her ability—such as it was—quiet, calling it unseemly. She could see through him. He wasn't so much embarrassed to have an Allomancer daughter as to have one that was illegitimate. He couldn't have Marasi looking like a better catch than Steris.

Bitter thoughts, she told herself, intentionally pushing them away. Bitterness could consume a woman. Best to keep it at arm's length.

"This gun is good work," Ranette said, though she sounded grudging. She'd donned some spectacles with a magnifying lens on them, and was in the process of staring down the barrel of the revolver while shining a small electric light into it. "You want me to figure out who made this, I assume?"

Waxillium turned to study a line of half-finished guns on one of the tables. "Actually," he said, "we came here because we needed someplace safe to think for a few hours."

"Your mansion isn't safe?"

"My butler failed to poison me, then tried to shoot me, then set off an explosive in my study."

"Huh." She cocked the pistol a few times. "You need to screen these people better, Wax."

"I'll take that under advisement." He picked up a pistol and sighted down its barrel. "I'm going to need a new Sterrion."

"Like hell you will," Ranette said. "What's wrong with the ones you have?"

"Gave them to the aforementioned butler," Waxillium said. "And he probably dumped them in the canals."

"What of your Ambersairs? I made you one of those, didn't I?"

"You did. I lost it fighting Miles Dagouter earlier today."

This made Ranette stop. She lowered the aluminum gun, then turned her chair. *"What?"*

Waxillium drew his lips into a line. "He's the one we're hiding from."

"Why," Ranette said pointedly, "is Miles Hundredlives trying to kill you?"

Wayne strolled forward. "He's trying to overthrow the city or something, dearie. For some reason, he thinks the best way to do that is by robbin' folks and blowing up mansions."

“Don’t call me dearie.”

“Sure thing, honey.”

Marasi watched in silence, curious. Wayne seemed to like taunting this woman. In fact, though he tried to act nonchalant, he kept glancing at her, and had been edging through the room closer and closer to her seat.

“Whatever,” Ranette said, turning back to her work. “Don’t really care. But you’re not getting a new Sterrion.”

“Nobody else’s guns shoot as straight as yours, Ranette.”

She didn’t reply. She did glare at Wayne, who had moved up to the point where he was leaning over her shoulder and looking at the gun.

Waxillium smiled, then turned back to the unfinished guns on the desk. Marasi joined him, uncertain what she should be doing. Hadn’t they come here to plan their next move? Neither Waxillium nor Wayne seemed eager to get on with things.

“Is there something between them?” Marasi whispered, nodding her head toward Wayne and Ranette. “She acts a little like a jilted lover.”

“Wayne could only wish,” Waxillium whispered back. “Ranette’s not interested in him like that. I’m not certain she’s interested in *any* man like that. Doesn’t stop him from trying, though.” He shook his head. “I’m half tempted to think that all of this—coming to Elendel to investigate the Vanishers, looking me up—was about eventually persuading me to come with him to Ranette’s. He knew she wouldn’t let him in unless he was with me and we were doing something important.”

“You’re a bizarre pair, you know.”

“We try.”

“So what’s our next move?”

“I’m trying to decide. For now, if we linger long enough, she might give me a new revolver.”

“Either that, or she’ll shoot you for annoying her.”

“Nah. She’s never shot anyone after letting them in the door that I can recall. Not even Wayne.” He hesitated. “She’ll probably let you stay here, if you want. It would be safe. I’ll bet there’s a paid Coppercloud rotation going on in one of the nearby buildings, shrouding the area. Ranette *hates* people sensing her Allomancy. I doubt there are half a dozen people in Elendel who know she lives here. Harmony only knows how Wayne tracked her down.”

“I’d rather not stay. Please, whatever you’re doing, I want to help.”

He picked something up off the desk; a small box of bullets. “I can’t figure you out, Marasi Colms.”

“You’ve solved some of the most troubling crimes the Roughs have ever known, Lord Waxillium. I doubt I’m nearly as mysterious.”

“Your father is very well off,” Waxillium said. “From what I know of him, I’m certain he would have provided you with a comfortable endowment for the rest of your life. Instead, you attend university—choosing one of the most difficult programs of study offered.”

“You left a position of considerable comfort yourself,” she said, “choosing to live away from convenience and modernity.”

“I did.”

She selected one of the bullets out of the box, holding it up, looking it over. She couldn’t see anything distinctive about it. “Have you ever felt you were useless, Lord Waxillium?”

“Yes.”

“It’s difficult to imagine that of someone as accomplished as yourself.”

“Sometimes,” he said, “accomplishment and perception can work independently.”

“True. Well, my lord, I have spent *most* of my life being politely told I was useless. Useless to my father because of my birth; useless as an Allomancer; useless to Steris, as I was an embarrassment. Sometimes, accomplishment can temper perception. Or so I hope.”

He nodded. “I have something for you to do. It will be dangerous.”

She dropped the bullet into the box. “To be of use in even a single burst of flame and sound is worth more than a lifetime of achieving nothing.”

He met her eyes, judging her sincerity.

“You have a plan?” she asked.

“There isn’t much time for a plan. This is more of a hunch with scaffolding.” He held up the box of bullets, speaking more loudly. “Ranette, what are these?”

“Hazekiller rounds.”

“Hazekiller?” Marasi asked.

“It’s an ancient term,” Waxillium said. “For an ordinary person trained to fight Allomancers.”

“I’m working on ammunition for use against each basic type of Allomancer,” Ranette said absently. She’d unscrewed the grip of the pistol and was pulling it apart. “Those are Coinshot rounds. Ceramic tips. When they Push on the bullet as it flies toward them, they’ll yank off the metal portion at the back, but the ceramic should keep flying straight and hit them. Could be better than aluminum rounds—those, the Allomancer can’t sense at all, so he knows to take cover rather than relying on Pushes. These they’ll sense and assume they can beat—right up until they’re on the floor bleeding.”

Wayne whistled softly.

“Ruin, Ranette!” Waxillium said. “I’ve never been so glad we’re on the same side.” He hesitated. “Or, at least, that you’re on your own special side that we don’t happen to run afoul of too often.”

“What are you going to do with them?” Marasi asked.

“Do?” Ranette asked.

“Are you going to sell them?” Marasi said. “Patent the idea and license them?”

“If I did that, then *everybody* would have them!” Ranette shook her head, looking sick. “Half the people in the city would be here, bothering me.”

“Lurcher rounds?” Waxillium asked, holding up another box.

“Similar,” Ranette said, “but with the ceramic on the sides. Not quite as effective, at least at long range. Most Lurchers protect themselves by Pulling bullets to hit an armored plate at their chest. Those bullets, they explode when Pulled on, and you get a little shrapnel blast of ceramics. Should work at ten feet or so, though it might not be lethal. I suggest aiming for the head. I’m trying to get the range up.”

“Tineye rounds?”

“Make extra noise when fired,” Ranette said. “And another noise when they hit. Fire a few shots around them, and their enhanced senses will have them cowering on the floor, holding their ears. Pretty good if you want to take one alive, though with a Tineye, you’re going to have trouble finding them in the first place.”

“And Pewterarm rounds,” Waxillium said, studying the final box.

“Not really much special there,” Ranette said. “Large bullets, extra powder, wide hollow tips, soft metal—meant to have a lot of stopping power. A Pewterarm can keep going long after being shot a few times, so you want to knock them down and keep them there long enough for their body to realize it should be dying rather than fighting. Of course, the best way to drop one is just hit him in the head the first time.”

A Pewterarm wouldn't be like Miles, capable of healing immediately. They had great endurance, and could ignore wounds—but those wounds would still kill them, eventually.

"Huh," Waxillium said, holding up one of the long bullets. "None of these are a standard caliber. You'd need quite the gun to fire them."

Ranette didn't respond.

"This is nice work, Ranette," Waxillium said. "Even for you. I'm impressed."

Marasi expected the gruff woman to brush off the compliment, but Ranette smiled—though she obviously tried to hide her satisfaction. She buried her head in her work, and didn't even bother to glare Wayne away. "So who are the people you said are in danger?"

"Hostages," Waxillium said. "Women, including Marasi's cousin. Someone is going to try to use them to breed new Allomancers."

"And Miles is involved in *that*?"

"Yes." Waxillium's voice was solemn. Worried.

Ranette hesitated, still bent over the disassembled revolver. "Third cubby up," she finally said. "All the way at the back."

Waxillium walked over and reached a hand into the depths. He withdrew a sleek, silvery revolver with a grip that blended onyx and ivory in wavy stripes, separated by silver bands. It had a long barrel, the silvery metal so highly polished that it practically glowed in the even electric lights.

"That's not a Sterrion," Ranette said. "It's better."

"Eight chambers," Waxillium said, raising an eyebrow as he turned the revolver's cylinder.

"That's Invarian steel," Ranette said. "Stronger, lighter. It let me shave the thickness between chambers, increase the number without making it too big. See the lever on the back, below the hammer?"

He nodded.

"Hold it down and spin the wheel."

He did so. The wheel locked on a certain chamber.

"It skips that chamber and the one beside it if you fire it normally," Ranette said. "You can only fire them if you flip the lever."

"Hazekiller rounds," Waxillium said.

"Yeah. Load six ordinary shots, two special ones. Fire them when you need them. You burning steel?"

"I am now."

“Metal lines in the grip.”

“See them.”

“Push the one on the left.”

Something clicked inside the gun. Waxillium whistled softly.

“What?” Wayne asked.

“Allomancer-only safety,” Waxillium said. “You have to be a Coinshot or a Lurcher to turn it off or on.”

“The switch is embedded inside the grip,” Ranette said. “No exterior sign that it’s there. With that, you’ll never have to worry about someone firing your own gun at you.”

“Ranette,” Waxillium said, sounding awed. “That’s *genius*.”

“I call the gun Vindication,” she said. “After the Ascendant Warrior.” Then she hesitated. “You can borrow it. *If* you bring me a field-test report.”

Waxillium smiled.

“This is Nouxil’s work, by the way,” Ranette said, waving to her table.

“The aluminum gun?” Waxillium asked.

Ranette nodded. “I thought it might be so from the shape of the barrel, but the mechanics inside are distinctive.”

“Who is he?” Wayne asked, leaning down further.

Ranette pointedly put a hand to Wayne’s forehead and pushed him back. “Gunsmith. Disappeared about a year ago. We had a correspondence going. Nobody’s heard from him.” She held up a piece of metal from inside the gun grip. “Anyone here speak High Imperial?”

Waxillium shook his head.

“Makes my head hurt,” Wayne said.

“I can read it, kind of,” Marasi said, taking the square piece of metal. There were several characters scratched into the metal. “Wasing the where of needing,” she read, forming the unfamiliar words. The lofty tongue was used for old documents dating to the time of the Origin, and occasionally for government ceremony. “It’s a call for help.”

“Well, we know how Miles got his guns,” Waxillium said, taking the plate and looking it over.

“Wax,” Ranette said. “Miles always had a darkness in him, I know. But this? Are you *sure*?”

“Sure as I can be.” He raised Vindication up beside his head. “I saw him face-to-face, Ranette. He spouted some rhetoric about saving the city as he tried to kill me.”

“That’ll be useless against him,” Ranette said, nodding to Vindication. “I’ve been trying to figure out a gun to use against Bloodmakers. It’s only half finished.”

“This will be fine,” Waxillium said, voice even. “I’ll need every edge I can get.” His eyes were hard, like polished steel.

“I’d heard rumors you’d retired,” Ranette said.

“I had.”

“What changed?”

He slid Vindication into his shoulder holster. “I have a duty,” he said softly. “Miles was a lawkeeper. When one of your own goes bad, you put him down personally. You don’t rely on hired help. Wayne, I need shipping manifests. Can you borrow me some from the railway offices?”

“Sure. I can have them in an hour.”

“Good. You still have that dynamite?”

“Sure do. Here in my coat pocket.”

“You’re insane,” Waxillium said without missing a beat. “But you brought the pressure detonators?”

“Yup.”

“Try to avoid blowing anything up by accident,” Waxillium said. “But hold on to that dynamite. Marasi, I need you to buy some fishing nets. Strong ones.”

She nodded.

“Ranette,” Waxillium began, “I—”

“I’m not part of your little troop of deputies, Wax,” Ranette said. “Leave me out of this.”

“All I was going to do was ask to borrow a room in your house and some paper,” Waxillium said. “I need to sketch this out.”

“Fine,” she said. “So long as you’re quiet about it. But Wax … you *really* think you can take Miles? The man is immortal. You’d need a small army to stop him.”

“Good,” Waxillium said. “Because I intend to bring one.”

15

“Wax is slippery,” Miles said, walking alongside Mister Suit through the dark tunnel connecting the dorms to the forging hall of the new lair. “He has lived so long precisely by learning to avoid being killed by people who are stronger and craftier than he is.”

“You shouldn’t have revealed yourself,” Suit said sternly.

“I wasn’t about to shoot Wax without him seeing me, Suit,” Miles said. “He deserves more respect than that.” The words gnawed at him as he said them. He hadn’t mentioned the first shot he’d taken at Wax, the one while the man’s back had been turned. Nor had he mentioned the cloth of his mask, pushed back into his flesh by Wax’s bullet, making it hard to heal his eye. He’d needed to pull it free.

Suit snorted. “And it’s said that the Roughs are the place where honor goes to be murdered.”

“It’s the place honor goes to be strung up, flayed within an inch of its life, then cut down and left in a desert. If it survives something like that, it’ll be stronger than hell. Certainly stronger than anything you have at your Elendel dinner parties.”

“That from a man who so readily went to kill a friend?” Suit said. The tone was still suspicious. He thought Miles had intentionally let Wax escape.

He didn’t understand at all. This wasn’t about the robberies any longer. The paths chosen by Wax and Miles had crossed. The future could only continue down one or the other.

Either Wax would die or Miles would. That would settle the matter. Roughs justice. The Roughs weren’t a simple place, but they *were* a place of simple solutions.

“Wax is *not* a friend,” Miles said, and truthfully. “We were never friends—no more than two rival kings could ever be friends. We respect each other, we did similar jobs, and we worked together. It ends there. I’ll stop him, Suit.”

They stepped out into the forging room and climbed the stairs up to the balcony that ran along the north side of the large chamber. They walked to the end and stopped beside a doorway, beyond which was the lift. “You are quickly becoming a liability, lawkeeper,” Suit said. “The Set does *not* like you, though—as of yet—I have continued to vouch for your effectiveness. Do not make me regret that. Many of my colleagues are convinced that you will turn against us.”

Miles didn’t know if he would or not. He hadn’t decided. He basically only wanted one thing: vengeance. All of the best motives boiled down to a single, driving emotion.

Vengeance for fifteen years in the Roughs, achieving nothing. If this city burned, maybe—for once—the Roughs would see some justice. And maybe Miles could see a government set up here in Elendel that wasn’t corrupt. A part of him acknowledged, however, that seeing them—the lords who ruled, the constables who pandered, the senators who spoke so grandly but did nothing of use to real people—cast down would be the most satisfying part.

The Set was part of the establishment. But then, they wanted revolution too. Perhaps he wouldn’t turn against them. Perhaps.

“I don’t like being in this place, Suit,” Miles said, nodding to the chamber where the Vanishers had set up. “It’s too close to the center of things. My men will be seen coming and going.”

“We will move you soon,” Suit said. “The Set is in the process of acquiring a railway station. You are still committed to the job tonight?”

“I am. We need more resources.”

“My colleagues question that,” Suit said. “They wonder why we went to so much trouble to outfit your men with aluminum, if it was only to be lost in a single fight without so much as killing one of the Allomancers who faced you.”

It’s important, Miles thought, *because I intended to use that aluminum to finance my own operations.* Now he was practically destitute, right back where he’d begun. *Damn you, Wax. Damn you straight to Ironeyes’ Tomb.*

“Do your colleagues question what I’ve done for them?” Miles said, drawing himself up. “Five of the women they wanted are in your possession, all without a speck of suspicion attached to you and the Set. If you wish that to continue, my men will be *properly* outfitted. A single Rioter could turn the entire bunch against one another.”

Suit eyed him. The slender old man did not walk with a cane, and his back was straight. He was not weak, despite his age and obvious fondness for fine living. The door to the lift opened. Two young men wearing black suits and white shirts walked out of it.

“The Set has agreed to this job tonight,” Suit said. “After it, you are to go to ground for six months and focus on recruitment. We will prepare another list of targets for you to acquire for us. When you return to activity, we will discuss whether or not the flamboyance of being the ‘Vanishers’ is required.”

“The theatrics keep the constables from—”

“We will discuss it *then*. Will Wax try to interfere tonight?”

“I’m counting on it,” Miles said. “If we try to hide, he’ll dig us out eventually. But it won’t come to that—he’ll figure out where we’re going to hit, and he’ll be there trying to stop us.”

“You are to kill him tonight, then,” Suit said, pointing to the two men. “The woman you took yesterday will remain here; use her as bait, if it comes to that. We don’t want to move her while that one has her trail. As for these two, they are to aid you in making certain everything goes smoothly.”

Miles gritted his teeth. “I don’t need help to—”

“You *will* take them,” Suit said coldly. “You’ve proven unreliable with regard to Waxillium. It is not open for discussion.”

“Fine.”

Suit stepped closer, tapping Miles on the chest and speaking softly. “The Set is anxious, Miles. Our monetary resources are very limited at the moment. You may rob the train, but don’t bother with hostages. We will take half of the aluminum you steal tonight to fund several operations you need not know about. You can have the rest for weapons.”

“Have your two men there ever fought Allomancers?”

“They are among our finest,” Suit said. “I think you’ll find them more than capable.”

They both knew what this was. Yes, the two would fight Wax, but they would also keep an eye on Miles. *Great.* More interference.

"I'm leaving the city," Suit said. "Wax is getting too close. If you survive the night, send someone to update me." He said that last part with a hint of a smile.

Insufferable bastard, Miles thought as Suit walked over to the lift, where a quartet of bodyguards waited. He was leaving on his regular train; he'd probably come back on his regular one too. He probably didn't realize Miles had been tracking those.

Suit departed, leaving Miles with the two black-coated men. Well, he'd find some use for them.

He returned to the main chamber, followed by his new babysitters. The Vanishers—the thirty or so of them that remained—were getting ready for the job tonight. The Machine had been brought into the chamber via the far platform, which moved up to ground level in a large industrial lift, a majestic electrical wonder.

The world is changing, Miles thought, leaning down on the railing. *First railways, now electricity. How long before men take to the skies, as the Words of Founding say is possible?* The day might come where every man knew the freedom that had once been reserved only to Coinshots.

Change didn't scare Miles. Change was an opportunity, a chance to become something you were not. No Augur was bothered by change.

Augur. He usually ignored that side of himself. His Feruchemy was what kept him alive—and these days he hardly noticed even that, save for the faint sense of extra *energy* to every step he took. He never got headaches, never felt tired, never had sore muscles, never dealt with colds or pain.

On a whim, he took hold of the banister and swung over, dropping to the floor some twenty feet below. For a brief moment, he knew that sense of freedom. Then he hit. One of his legs tried to break—he recognized the slight pop. But the bone's fractures reknit as quickly as they broke, and so it never fully snapped, cracks opening on one side but resealing on the other.

He rose from a crouch, whole. The black-coated babysitters dropped beside him, one dropping a bit of metal and slowing a moment before he hit. A Coinshot. Well, that would be useful. The other surprised him, landing softly, but not dropping any metal. The ceiling had metal crossbeams. This man would be a Lurcher; he'd Pulled upon those beams to slow himself.

Miles strode through the room, inspecting the Vanishers as they prepared their gear. Every bit of aluminum they had left had gone for guns and bullets. They’d use those from the start this time. At the wedding-dinner fight, it had taken the men a few moments to switch weapons. Now they knew what to anticipate. Their numbers might be fewer, but they’d be much better prepared.

He nodded to Clamps, who was watching over the men. The scarred man nodded back. He was loyal enough, though he had joined up for the thrill of robbery rather than the purpose of any cause. Of them all, only Tarson—dear, brutal Tarson—had anything resembling true loyalty.

Clamps claimed to be dedicated, though Miles knew otherwise. Well, Clamps hadn’t been the one to fire the first shot in the last mess. For all Miles’s professions about wanting to change things, his temper—and not his mind—had eventually ruled.

He should have been better than that. He was a man created to have a steady hand and an even steadier mind. Made by Trell, inspired by the Survivor, yet still weak. Miles questioned himself often. Was that the mark of a lack of dedication? He’d never done anything in his life without questioning.

He turned, studying his domain, such as it was. Thieves, murderers, and braggarts. He took a deep breath, then burned gold.

It was considered one of the least of the Allomantic metals. Far less useful than its alloy, which was in turn far less useful than one of the prime battle metals. In most cases, being a gold Misting was little better than being an aluminum Misting—a power so useless, it had become proverbial for one who did nothing.

But gold was not completely useless. Just mostly so. Upon burning it, Miles split. The change was visible only to his own senses, but for a moment, he was two people, two versions of himself. One was the man he had been. The angry lawkeeper, growing more bitter by the day. He wore a white duster over rugged clothing, with tinted spectacles to shade his eyes against the harsh sun. Dark hair kept short and greased back. No hat. He’d always hated those.

The other man was the man he’d become. Dressed in the clothing of a city worker—buttoned shirt and suspenders over dirty trousers with fraying cuffs. He walked with a slouch. When had that begun?

He could see through both pairs of eyes, think both sets of thoughts. He was two people at once, and each one loathed the other. The lawkeeper was intolerant, angry, and frustrated. He hated anything that broke with the strict order of the law, and meted out harsh punishments with no mercy. He had a special loathing for someone who had once followed the law, but had turned his back upon it.

The robber, the Vanisher, hated that the lawkeeper let others choose his rules. There was really nothing sacred about the law. It was arbitrary, created by powerful men to help them hold power. The criminal knew that secretly, deep down, the lawkeeper understood this. He was severe toward criminals because he felt so impotent. Each day, life grew worse for the good people, the people who tried, and the laws did little to help them. He was like a man swatting mosquitoes while ignoring the gash in his leg, an artery open and throbbing gushes of blood onto the floor.

Miles gasped, and extinguished his gold. He felt weary, suddenly, and slumped back against the wall. His two minders watched him with emotionless expressions.

“Go,” Miles said to them, waving a weak hand. “Check over my men. Use your Allomancy to determine if any of them accidentally left metal on their bodies. I want them clean.”

The two men looked at each other. They didn’t behave as if they cared to obey him.

“Go,” Miles said more firmly. “So long as you’re here, you should be useful.”

After another moment of hesitation, the two men walked away to do as ordered. Miles slumped down farther, back to the wall, breathing in and out.

Why do I do that to myself?

There had been considerable speculation about what a gold Misting really saw when burning his metal. A past version of himself, certainly. Was it the person he had actually been? Or was it a person he might have become, if he’d chosen another branching path of his life? That possibility had always struck him as sounding reminiscent of the mythical lost metal, atium.

Either way, he liked to think that burning his gold on occasion helped him—that each time he did it, it let him take the best of what he had been and mix it with the best of what he could be. An alloy of himself, then.

It disturbed him how much the two people he became hated each other. He could almost feel it like an oven’s heat, radiating from coal and stone.

He stood back up. Some of the men were staring at him, but he didn’t care. He wasn’t like the criminal bosses he’d often arrested in the Roughs.

They had to worry about looking strong in front of their men, lest they be killed by someone who wanted to seize power.

Miles couldn’t be killed, and his men knew it. He’d once put a shotgun to his own head in front of them to prove it.

He walked over to a pile of trunks and boxes. A few were full of things Mister Suit had ordered stolen from Wax’s mansion, effects the man hoped would help them fight—or perhaps frame—the former lawkeeper. Suit had resisted killing Wax at first, for some reason.

Miles left them and walked around to the back side, where his own trunks had been deposited following the hasty evacuation of their old hideout. He picked through a few, then opened one. His white duster was inside. He took it out, shaking it, then got out a pair of sturdy Roughs trousers and a matching shirt. He slipped his tinted spectacles into the pocket, then went to change.

He’d been worried about hiding, worried that he’d be recognized and branded an outlaw. Well, an outlaw was what he had become. If this was the path he had chosen, he could at least walk it with pride.

Let them see me for what I am.

He would not turn from his course. It was too late to change one’s aim when the hammer was already falling. But it wasn’t too late to straighten his back.

* * *

Waxillium stared at the wall of Ranette’s sitting room. One side was piled with furniture, where she’d put things out of the way to make a handier pathway between her workshop and her bedroom. The other half of the room was strewn with boxes of various kinds of ammunition, bits of scrap metal, and cast barrels for gun making. There was dust everywhere. Very like her. He’d asked her for a way to prop up his paper pad, expecting her to find him an easel. She’d absently handed him some nails and pointed toward a hammer. So he’d just hung it on the wall, wincing as he drove the nails into the fine wood.

He stepped up, using a pencil to scribble a note to himself in the corner. The pile of shipping manifests that Wayne had brought lay to the side. Apparently, Wayne had left a gun he’d borrowed from Ranette in place of the manifests, considering it a fair trade. It had probably never occurred to him that a group of train engineers would be completely baffled to find their manifests gone and a pistol in their place.

Miles will strike at Carlo's Bend, Wax thought, tapping the paper.

It had been easy to locate a shipment of aluminum. House Tekiel, tired of being robbed, was indeed making a large fuss over their new vault-style railway car. Wax could understand the reasoning; the Tekiels were best known as bankers, and their business relied on security and asset protection. The robberies been become a major embarrassment to them. They were intending to recover in a visible way.

It was almost like a dare to Miles and his Vanishers. Wax made another notation on his paper. The Tekiel shipment would follow a very direct route toward Doxonar. He'd mapped it, noting locations where the railway tracks wound close to one of the canals.

I won't be able to watch where we're going, Wax thought, making another notation. *I need to know exactly how far from the previous stop Carlo's Bend is.…*

There wasn't much time to prepare. He fingered the earring in his left hand, running his thumb along its smooth side as he thought.

The door opened. Wax didn't look up, but the sound of the footsteps was enough to tell him it was Marasi. Soft shoes. Ranette and Wayne both wore boots.

Marasi cleared her throat.

"Nets?" Wax asked, distractedly writing the number 35.17 on the paper.

"I found some, finally," she said, walking up beside him, looking over the notations. "You can make sense of this?"

"For the most part. Except Wayne's doodles."

"They … appear to be pictures of you. Unflatteringly ugly ones."

"That's the part that doesn't make sense," Waxillium said. "Everyone knows I'm irreparably handsome." He smiled to himself. That was one of Lessie's phrases. Irreparably handsome. She'd always claimed he'd look better with a nice scar on his face, after good Roughs fashion.

Marasi smiled too, though her eyes were on his notations and scribbling. "The phantom railcar?" she asked, pointing to his drawing of a ghostly train coming down the tracks, alongside a diagram of how it had probably been made.

"Yes," he said. "Most of the attacks happened on misty nights, apparently to make it much easier to hide the fact that the phantom 'train' is really just a false front with a large headlamp, attached to a moving rail platform."

"You're certain?"

"Reasonably," Waxillium said. "They're using the canals to attack, and so they need some sort of diversion to keep eyes off what is sneaking up behind."

She pursed her lips, thoughtful.

"Was Wayne out there?" Waxillium asked.

"Yes, he's bothering Ranette. I … honestly left the room because I worried she'd shoot him."

Waxillium smiled.

"I picked up a broadsheet when I was out," she said. "The constables have found the old hideout."

"Already?" Waxillium said. "Wayne said we had until dark."

"It's dark already."

"It is? Hell." Waxillium checked his watch. They had less time than he'd thought. "It still shouldn't be in the papers yet. The police found the hideout early."

Marasi nodded toward his sketches. "This indicates that you know where the Vanishers will strike. I don't want to pound a brittle metal, Lord Waxillium, but we really should tell the constables that fact."

"I *think* I know where the attack will happen. If we let the constables know, they'll flood the area and scare off Miles."

"Wax," she said, stepping closer. "I understand that independent spirit; it's part of what makes you what you are. But we're not in the Roughs. You don't have to do this all by yourself."

"I don't intend to. I'll involve the constables, I promise. Miles, however, is not an ordinary criminal. He knows what the constables will try, and he will watch for them. This has to be done at the right time, in the right way." Waxillium tapped his notations on the wall. "I know Miles. I know how he thinks. He's like me."

Almost *too* much so.

"That means he can anticipate you too."

"He undoubtedly will. I'll anticipate him better."

The moment Waxillium had drawn his gun and fired back against the Vanishers, he'd started down this path. Once he got his teeth into something, he didn't let go.

"You are right about me," he said.

"Right? I don't believe I said anything about you, Lord Waxillium."

"You're thinking it," he said. "That I'm arrogant for wanting to do this my way, for not handing this over to the constables. That I'm foolhardy to not look for help. You're right."

"It's not so bad as that," she said.

"It's not bad at all," he said. "I *am* arrogant and foolhardy. I *am* acting like I'm still in the Roughs. But I'm also right." He reached up, drawing a small square on the paper, then an arrow from it toward the precinct building.

"I've written a letter for Ranette to send to the constables," he continued. "It details everything I've discovered, and my guesses on what Miles will do, should I fail to best him. I won't make any move tonight until we're well away from the railway and any passengers. The Vanishers won't take a hostage tonight. They'll try to be as quick and as silent as possible.

"But it will still be dangerous. People might die, innocent ones. I'll try my best to keep them from harm, and I firmly believe I have a better chance against Miles than the constables would. I realize that you are studying to be an attorney and a judge, and that your training mandates you should go to the authorities. Considering my plans, and my promises, will you refrain and help me instead?"

"Yes."

Harmony, he thought. *She trusts me.* Too much, probably. He reached up, squaring off a box of notes. "This is your part."

"I won't be in the train car with you?" She sounded worried.

"No," Waxillium said. "You and Wayne will watch from the hilltop."

"You'll be alone."

"I will."

She fell silent. "You knew what I was thinking of you. What are *you* thinking of *me,* Lord Waxillium?"

He smiled. "If the game is to work the same way, I can't tell you my thoughts. You need to guess them."

"You are thinking about how young I am," she said. "And you're worried about having me involved, lest I be hurt."

"Hardly a difficult guess. So far, I've given you what … three opportunities to abandon this course and seek safety?"

"You're *also* thinking," she said, "that you're glad I insist on staying, because I will be useful. Life has taught you to use the resources you have."

"Better," he said.

"You think I'm clever, as you have stated. But you also worry that I get flustered too easily, and worry it will be used against you."

"Do those records you've read talk about Paclo the Dusty?"

"Sure. He was one of your deputies before you met Wayne."

"He was a good friend," Waxillium said. "And a solid lawman. But I've *never* met a man who was as easy to startle as Paclo. A softly closed door could make him yelp."

She frowned.

"I assume the records didn't talk about that," Waxillium said.

"They depict him as very brave."

"He *was* brave, Lady Marasi. You see, many people mistake startlement for cowardice. Yes, a gunshot would make Paclo jump. Then he'd run to see what had caused it. I once saw him stare down six men with guns trained on him, and he didn't break a sweat."

He turned to her. "You are inexperienced. So was I, once. So is every man. The measure of a person is not how much they have lived. It is not how easily they jump at a noise or how quick they are to show emotion. It's in how they make use of what life has shown them."

Her blush deepened. "I'm also thinking that you like to lecture."

"It comes with the lawman's badge."

"You don't … wear that anymore."

"A man can take it off, Lady Marasi. But he can never stop wearing it."

He met her gaze. She looked up with eyes that were deep, reflective, like the water of an unexpected spring in the Roughs. He steeled himself. He would be bad for her. Very bad. He'd thought the same of Lessie, and he had been right.

"There's another thing I'm thinking about you," she said softly. "Can you guess it?"

All too well.

With reluctance, he broke her gaze and looked at the pad. "Yes. You are thinking that I should talk Ranette into lending you a rifle. I agree. While I do think that it would be wise of you to train with a revolver eventually, I'd rather you spend this particular encounter with a weapon you use well. Maybe we can find a rifle that will fit those aluminum rounds Wayne grabbed."

"Oh. Of course."

Waxillium pretended not to notice her embarrassment.

"I think," Marasi said, "that I'll go check on Wayne and Ranette."

"Good idea. Hopefully she hasn't discovered that he took one of her guns to trade."

Marasi withdrew, walking to the door in haste.

"Lady Marasi?" Waxillium called.

She hesitated at the door, turning, hopeful.

"You did a good job of reading me," he said, nodding in respect. "Not many can do that. I'm not known to be free with my emotions."

"Advanced interrogation techniques class," she said. "And … uh, I've read your psychological profile."

"I have a psychological profile?"

"Yes, I'm afraid. Doctor Murnbru wrote it after his visit to Weathering."

"That little rat Murnbru was a *psychologist*?" Waxillium said, genuinely baffled. "I was sure he was a gambling cheat, passing through town looking for marks to swindle."

"Er, yes. That's in the profile. You, uh, have a tendency to think anyone who wears too much red is a chronic gambler."

"I do?"

She nodded.

"Damn," he said. *I'm going to need to read that thing.*

She left and pulled the door closed. He turned back to his plan once again. He raised his hand and slipped his earring into his ear. He was supposed to wear it when praying, or when doing something of great import.

He figured that tonight, he'd be doing a lot of both.

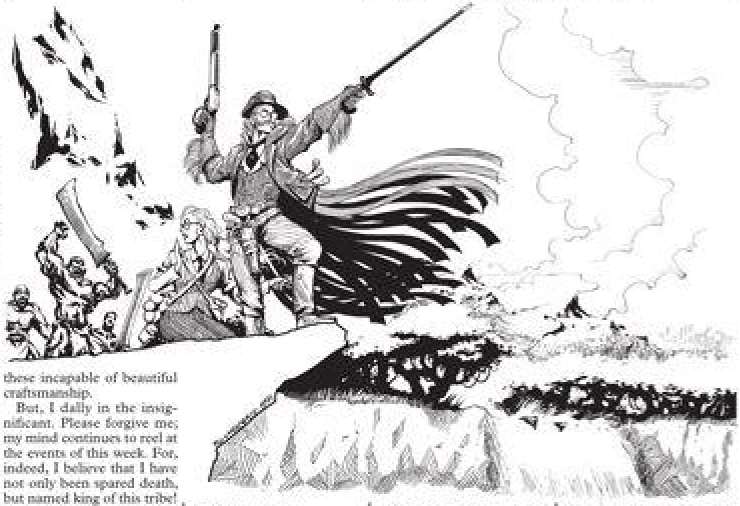
of the people of the oceans and their mystical Unknown Metals. Full story, reverse side.

Briggs & Sons,
Licensed Metallurgists
3217 Smelter's Row, 6th Oct.

of one of the Faceless Immortals? Delusion? Simple fancy? You decide. Story on the reverse, in the fifth column.

FUTURE, TODAY!

The Association of Transport Interests is a division of the Greater Basin Automotive Conglomerate, and is responsible for the content of this message.



these incapable of beautiful craftsmanship.

But, I dally in the insignificant. Please forgive me; my mind continues to reel at the events of this week. For, indeed, I believe that I have not only been spared death, but named king of this tribe!

It began on the dawn of my aforementioned execution. After being dragged awake in a not-too-kind fashion, I found myself beneath the blaring sun, trudging across the red, dusty ground. The brutes stood in silent lines, watching me with beady eyes, their skin a darkened blue, the color of a fine blue scarf if it had been singed by fire and charred. Red dust stained their bodies, and many wore the most bare of clothing.

I owe my life to Handerwym. Faithful Handerwym; I bless the day I pulled him from that lake, sodden and near drowned. The faithful Terrisman, though sworn not to harm or kill, has proved his worth a hundred times. The koloss seemed to respect him, you see, and allowed him a final approach to embrace his master, soon to be murdered in the most bleak of fashions.

Upon that embrace, I found my Glint—my trusty revolver—slipped into my hand, bound behind my back. I asked how he slipped it away from the koloss, and he explained that he had made use of one of his metalminds to create a connection to the koloss. It is an arcane art he uses, unexplored and unknown, and he wishes for me to write very little in the way of explanation, as he regards its power as sacred.

Well, I was armed, but still bound. Connection notwithstanding, the koloss pulled him away, though they didn't seem to realize what he had done. I had never had reason to bless the overly long sleeves of the jacket I received in exchange from that bandit so many weeks ago, but in this case, they may have proved my salvation.

When I tell you of this shot, I ask that you not think too highly of me. Indeed, it was more chance than skill that proved my friend that day. I had managed to wiggle my way free of the bonds slightly, so that I could move one hand down below the other. I twisted the gun in my fingers and was able to lay it flat against my palm, the barrel pointing upward along my arm. At the last moment before I was to meet the headsman, I ducked my head forward and pulled the trigger.

Preservation prevailed, and though I felt the bullet graze the back of my head, it also passed through my bindings. A quick jerk of my hands freed me at that point, and though I was exhausted, I still had some small amount of tin left inside of me. I burned it, enhancing my senses, and raised the gun to shoot the executioner between the eyes. Koloss are strong, but even they can fall to a bullet in the right place.

The next shot felled the largest of their leaders. I had hoped this alone would secure me with their awe, but while it gave them pause, it did not make them free me. Glint had been loaded with only three bullets when I left her; I looked to Handerwym, and he shook his head grimly. He had not had the ammunition to reload her.

I was left with one bullet and an entire village full of monsters. I will not lie and say I was confident in my chances! However, I should mention to you a curious aspect about the koloss. You see, ever since their first interaction with me, they had been insistent that anyone may join them. Any man they deemed worthy could be made koloss, they claimed. Indeed, several of their most brutish and powerful warriors claimed to have once been men from the City. Obviously false, but there is something in their mindset that makes them think this way.

And so, with my single bullet, I decided to prove to them that I was worthy to join them. Only a test of the greatest skill would provide this proof, I decided, and so, I raised the gun and—

—*Continued next week!!*—

Cultivated gentlemen in all octants agree;
Only electric lights will do!

DO NOT BE CAUGHT IN THE DARK!

Send runner to Brigs Wennington with # of rooms for estimate.
4567 Cunning Pl, 5th Oct.

16

Wayne hobbled through the railway station, supporting himself on his brown cane, walking with a slow, intentionally frail step. There was quite a crowd pushing and shoving one another and gawking at the train up ahead. A group of them surged to the side, nearly toppling him.

Everyone was standing up so tall. That gave Wayne—back bent with age—no hope of seeing what the fuss was about. “No thought for a poor elderly woman,” Wayne grumbled. A gravelly tone, nasal and higher-pitched than his normal voice, mixed with a nice Margothian District accent. The district no longer existed, at least not in the same way; it had been consumed by the industrial quarter of its octant, its residents moving away. A dying accent for a dying woman. “No respect at all. A travesty, I tell you. Plain and simple, that’s what it is.”

A few youths in the crowd in front glanced back at him, taking in his ancient coat—it went down to his ankles—his face furrowed with age, his silvery hair beneath a felt cap. “Sorry, ma’am,” one of them finally said, making way for him.

Now, there’s a nice boy, Wayne thought, patting his arm and hobbling forward. One by one, people made way for him. Sometimes it took a little fit of coughing that sounded like it might be contagious. Wayne was careful not to look like a beggar. That would draw the attention of constables, who might think he was looking for marks to pickpocket.

No, he wasn’t a beggar. He was Abrigain, an old woman who had come to see what the fuss was about. Abrigain wasn’t rich, nor was she poor. Frugal, with a meticulously patched coat, a favored hat that had once been fashionable. Spectacles thick as a dockworker’s wits. A few very young boys let her by, and Abrigain gave them each a piece of candy, patting them on their heads. Nice boys. They reminded Abrigain of her grandchildren.

Wayne eventually reached the front. There, the Breaknaught sat in all its glory. It was a train car built like a fortress, with thick steel armor, shiny rounded corners, and a massive door on the side. That door looked like the one to an enormous vault, with a rotating wheel lock on the outside.

The door was open, and the chamber inside was mostly empty. A large steel cargo box had been *welded* to the floor at the center of the railcar. In fact, he could see through the door in the railcar that the cargo box itself looked as if it had been welded shut on all sides.

"Oh, my!" Wayne said. "That *is* impressive."

A guard stood nearby, wearing the insignia of an officer in the private security force of House Tekiel. He smiled, puffing out his chest with pride. "It marks the dawn of a new era," he said. "The end of banditry and railway robberies."

"Oh, it's impressive, young man," Wayne said. "But surely you exaggerate. I've seen railcars before—I even rode on one, curse that day. My grandson Charetel wanted me to come with him and meet his bride over in Covingtar, and it was the only way, though I thought riding in a horse cart had *always* worked well enough for me before. Progress, he'd called it. Progress is getting locked up in a box, I suppose, unable to see the sun overhead or enjoy the trip. Anyway, that train car was like this one. Only not so shiny."

"I assure you," the guard said, "this is *quite* impregnable. It will change everything. You see that door?"

"It locks," Wayne said. "I can see that. But safes can be cracked, young man."

"Not this one," he said. "Bandits won't be able to open it because it can't be opened—not by them, and not by us. Once that door is closed, it engages a mechanism tied to a ticking clock inside the doors. Those doors cannot be opened again for twelve hours, regardless of whether or not one knows the door code."

"Explosives," Wayne said. "Bandits are always blowing things up. *Everyone* knows that."

"That steel is six inches thick," the guard said. "The amount of dynamite it would take to blow it open would likely destroy the contents of the car."

"But surely an Allomancer could get in," Wayne said.

"How? They could Push on the metal all they wanted; it's so heavy, it would toss them backward. And even if they somehow *did* get in, we will have eight guards riding inside the railcar.”

“My,” Wayne said, letting his accent slip. “That’s impressive indeed. What will the guards be armed with?”

“A full quartet of…” the man began, but then trailed off, looking more closely at Wayne. “Of…” His eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“Oh, I’m missing my tea!” Wayne exclaimed, then turned and began hobbling back through the crowd.

“Stop that woman!” the guard said.

Wayne stopped pretending and stood up straight, shoving his way through the crowd with more fervor. He glanced over his shoulder. The guardsman was forcing his way forward in pursuit. “Stop!” the guardsman yelled. “Stop, damn you!”

Wayne raised his cane and pulled the trigger. His hand started wobbling as it always did when he tried to use a gun, but this one only had blanks in it, so it was all right. The pistol-like crack drove the crowd into a panic, people ducking down in a wave like wind blowing through a field of grain.

Wayne darted through the prostrate figures, hopping over some of them, reaching the back of the crowd. The guard raised his gun; Wayne dashed around a corner of the station building. Then he stopped time.

He threw off his coat, then pulled off the blouse underneath, revealing a gentleman’s suit: black coat, white shirt, red cravat. Wax had called it “purposefully unimaginative,” whatever that meant. He removed the items that, tied to the inside of the blouse, had formed the elderly woman’s bust: a small bag, a collapsible gentleman’s hat, and a wet rag. He unfolded the hat and stuffed the blouse into the extra space inside it before pulling off his wig and putting the hat on his head.

He ripped the outer layer off his cane, turning it black instead. He tossed the wig aside, then dropped the bag by the wall. Finally, he wiped his face clean of makeup with the rag, discarded it, then collapsed his speed bubble.

He stumbled out around the corner of the building, acting as if he’d been shoved. He cursed, straightening his hat and raising his black cane, shaking it in anger.

The guard puffed up beside him. “Are you all right, m’lord?”

“No!” Wayne snapped, filling his voice with every ounce of aristocratic condescension he could manage. Madion Ways accent, the richest area of the First Octant—where House Tekiel owned much of the land. “What kind of ruffian was that, Captain! The launch was supposed to be handled with poise and care!”

The guard froze, and Wayne could see his mind working. He’d been expecting a random nobleman, but this person sounded like a member of House Tekiel—the guard’s employers.

“Sorry, m’lord!” the guard said. “But I chased ’im off.”

“Who was he?” Wayne said, walking over to the wig. “He threw this aside as he passed me.”

“Was dressed up like an elderly woman,” the guard said, scratching his head. “Asking me questions about the Breaknaught.”

“Damn it all, man. That must have been one of the Vanishers!”

The guard paled.

“Do you know how embarrassed our house will be if something happens on this trip?” Wayne said, stepping in, shaking the cane. “Our reputation is on the line. Our *heads* are on the line, Captain. How many guards do you have?”

“Three dozen, m’lord, and—”

“Not enough! Not enough at all! Send for more.”

“I—”

“No!” Wayne said. “I’ll do it. I have several of my own guards here. I’ll send one to fetch another division. Your men are watching the area for more *creatures* such as that one?”

“Well, I haven’t told them yet, m’lord. Thought I’d try to get ’im myself, you see, and—”

“You left your post?” Wayne screamed, raising hands to the side of his head, cane dangling from his fingers. “You let him *lure you away*? Idiot! Get back, man! Go! Alert the others. Oh, Survivor above. If this goes wrong, we’re dead. Dead!”

The guard captain scrambled back and ran for the train, where people were moving away in a panic. Wayne leaned back against the wall, checked his pocket watch, then waited for a good moment when he had enough space to put a speed bubble. He was reasonably sure nobody was looking.

Off came the hat. He dropped the cane and reversed his jacket, turning it into a brown and yellow military coat, matching that of the guards. He pulled off his fake nose and took a triangular cloth cap out of the bag he’d dropped by the wall.

He put this on his head instead of the gentleman’s hat. Always have the right hat. That was key. He strapped a handgun on over the coat after dropping his pants, revealing the soldier’s uniform beneath. Then he collapsed his bubble and jogged around the corner, making his way up to the tracks. He found the captain organizing his men, yelling orders. There were some angry noblemen arguing with one another nearby.

The cargo wasn’t being unloaded. That was good. Wayne had figured they’d just give up on this run, with all the fuss, but Wax had disagreed. He said that the Tekiels had made such a big deal of the Breaknaught that a hiccup or two wouldn’t stop them.

Fools, Wayne thought, shaking his head. Farnsward didn’t agree with the decision. He’d been in House Tekiel’s private guard for ten years now, though he’d mostly served on the Outer Estates with his lord, who was chronically ill. Farnsward had seen a lot in his time, and he’d learned that there *were* reasons to take risks. To save a life, to win a battle, to protect the house’s name. But to take a risk just because you’d said you would? Foolishness.

He jogged up to the captain he’d talked to earlier and saluted. “Sir,” he said. “I’m Farnsward Dubs—Lord Evenstrom Tekiel said I should report to you.” An Outer Estates accent with a hint of aristocracy, picked up from so long associating with them.

The man was looking frazzled. “Very well. I guess we can use every man.”

“Sorry, sir,” Wayne said, leaning in. “Lord Evenstrom is excitable, sometimes. I know how it goes; this isn’t the first time he’s sent me to help someone who didn’t need it. Bren and I will stay out of your way.”

“Bren?”

“Oh, he was right behind me,” Wayne said, turning around, looking confused.

Wax ducked out of the station, wearing a uniform similar to Wayne’s. He also had a fake paunch of some size, hiding some specific materials he’d need for the night.

“There he is,” Wayne said. “He’s a dull-minded lout, sir. His father left him the position, but you could hit his steel against flint all night and not get a spark, if you know what I mean.”

“Well, stay here,” the captain said. “Guard this post. Don’t let anyone approach the train car, no matter what they look like.” He left, running over to the batch of noblemen.

"'Ello, Wax," Wayne said, tipping his hat to the other man. "Ready to get swallowed?"

Waxillium glanced back toward the station building. Civilians were still scattering. The ground was littered with hats and handkerchiefs. "You need to make sure they still send the train, Wayne. No matter what, it *must* go forward."

"I thought you said they'll be too embarrassed not to launch it."

"For the first part, yes. Not so sure about this next part. Make it happen, Wayne."

"Sure thing, mate." Wayne checked his watch. "She's late—"

A sudden series of cracks split the air. Gunshots. Even though Wayne was expecting them, they still made him jump. The guards around them cried out, shouting, looking for the source of the shots. Waxillium fell, screaming, blood spraying from his shoulder. Wayne caught him as another guard spotted flashes coming from atop the building.

The guards opened fire as Wayne dragged Waxillium out of harm's way. He looked about, then—acting frantic—shoved Waxillium into the open door of the railcar. Several of the guards looked at him, but nobody said a word. Waxillium's eyes were staring dead into the air. The other guards had probably lost mates to bandits or house skirmishes, and they knew. In the heat of the fighting, you got the wounded to safety, and it didn't bloody matter where.

The firing stopped from atop the building, but it started up again from a rooftop nearby. A few bullets sprayed sparks from the top of a nearby girder. *A little close there, Marasi,* Wayne thought with annoyance. Why did every woman he met try to shoot him? Just because he could heal from it. That was like drinking a man's beer just because he could order more.

Wayne plastered a worried look on his face. "They're comin' for the cargo!" he yelled. Then he grabbed the door to the large cargo car, kicked the counterbalance lever to the side, and ran forward. He slammed the door on the Breaknaught shut—Wax inside the railcar, Wayne himself standing outside—before anyone thought to stop him.

The gunfire stopped. Nearby, the guards cowering behind cover looked at Wayne with horrified expressions. The door to the train clicked into place, settling in.

“Rust and Ruin, man!” one of the nearby soldiers said. “What have you done?”

“Locked up the cargo!” Wayne said. “Look, it made them stop.”

“There were supposed to be soldiers inside there!” the captain said, running up to him.

“They were trying to get in before we got it locked,” Wayne said. “You saw what they were doing.” He looked at the door. “They can’t get to the cargo now. We’ve won!”

The captain looked concerned. He glanced at the noblemen who were picking themselves off the ground. Wayne held his breath as they came storming over to the captain. The captain, however, repeated Wayne’s same words.

“But we stopped them,” the captain explained, knowing that he—and not Wayne—would bear the blame if it was decided that mistakes had been made. “They dropped their attack. We won!”

Wayne stepped back, relaxing against a pillar as guards were sent to try to find out who had been shooting. They came back with a large number of rifle bullet casings planted on the ground in various locations, though most of the “shots” had been blanks. Several beggar boys had been paid to fire blanks into the air, then plant stories of men getting into horse carriages and riding away in a hurry.

In under an hour, the train was on its way—with everyone at House Tekiel convinced they’d fought off a major Vanishers robbery. There was even talk of giving Wayne a commendation, though he deflected the glory to the captain and slipped away before anyone could begin asking just *which* lord retained him as a bodyguard.

17

Waxillium rode alone in the cold cargo railcar, shoulder wet with fake blood, listening to the wheels thump over the tracks beneath him. A swinging lamp hung where he'd placed it on a hook in the ceiling, near a corner. He'd also secured the webbing of nets on the ceiling, tucked up and held in place by special hooks affixed with industrial tape. It felt good to have all of that removed from wrapping around his legs, thighs, and fake paunch. His guard's uniform, now much too large for him, lay in a heap in the corner, and he wore a utilitarian pair of suit pants and a light black jacket instead.

He sat on the floor, back to the side of the cargo container, legs stretched out. He held Vindication in his hand, absently spinning the cylinder and hitting the switch to lock it on to the special chambers. He had two of each type of hazekiller round in his pocket, and had loaded a Coinshot round and a Pewterarm round into the special chambers.

He still had his earring in.

You wanted me to do this, he thought toward Harmony. Did an accusation count as a prayer? *Well, here I am. I'll expect a little help, if that's acceptable to your immortal plan, and all that.*

The cargo box was beside him. He could see why House Tekiel was so proud of the job they'd done; the welded strongbox would be ridiculously difficult for thieves to steal. Getting it out of the car would require hours spent cutting it free with a gas torch or a large electric saw. That, plus the clever door and the supposed existence of guards, would make for a daunting—perhaps impossible—robbery.

Yes, the Tekiels had been clever. Problem was, they were thinking about this all wrong.

Waxillium pulled a package from beneath his coat. The dynamite and detonator that Wayne had found. He set the package beside him on the floor, then eyed his pocket watch. *Right about now …*

The train suddenly started to slow.

* * *

"Yup," Wayne said, looking through the spyglass as he crouched against the hillside. "He's right. Wanna see?"

Marasi took the spyglass nervously. The two of them were in position following a hasty gallop out of the city. She felt naked, wearing a pair of Ranette's trousers. *Completely* improper. Every man they passed would stare at her legs.

Maybe that will stop the Vanishers from shooting, she thought with a grimace. *They'll be too distracted.* She raised the spyglass to her eye. She and Wayne were atop a hill along the railway route, outside of the City. It was nearly midnight when the train had finally come chugging along.

Now it was slowing, and the brakes caused screeches and sparks in the night. Ahead of the train, a ghostly apparition was approaching in the opposite direction, a bright light shining in front of it. She shivered. The phantom railcar.

"Wax'll be happy," Wayne said.

"What?" she asked. "About the phantom?"

"No. There's mist tonight."

She started, realizing that it was forming in the air. The mist wasn't like a normal fog; it didn't come rolling in over the ocean. It grew in the air, sprouting like frost on a cold piece of metal. She shivered as it began to envelop them, giving the headlamps below a ghostly cast.

She focused the spyglass on the approaching train. Because she'd been warned what to look for, and because of her angle, she could easily see the truth. It *was* a decoy. A hand-propelled rail wagon behind a wooden engine facade.

"How do they make the light work?" she said.

"I dunno. Magic?"

She snorted, trying to get a good look at what was behind the framework. "Must be some kind of chemical battery. I've read of the work … but Rust and Ruin, that's a *powerful* light. I doubt they can run it for long."

As the real train pulled to a halt, some men sprang from its sides. House Tekiel had sent guards. That gave Marasi a smile. Maybe the robbery wouldn't happen after all.

The front portion of the phantom train dropped.

"Aw, *hell*," Wayne said.

"What is—"

She was cut off by a loud series of shots, incredibly fast. She jumped back by reflex, ducking down, though nothing was aimed at them. Wayne grabbed the spyglass, raising it.

Marasi couldn't make out what happened next through the darkness and the mists. And she was glad. The shots continued, and she heard men screaming.

"Rotary gun," Wayne said softly. "Damn, these people are *serious*."

"I have to help," Marasi said, unslinging the rifle Ranette had given her. It was of an unfamiliar make, but the woman swore it would be more accurate than anything Marasi had ever used. She raised the rifle. If she could hit the Vanishers …

Wayne took the barrel of her rifle in one hand, gently pushing it down. The rotary gun stopped firing, and the night grew silent.

"There's nothing you can do, mate, and we don't want to draw the attention of that damn rotary. Besides, you really think you can hit one of them from all the way up here?"

"I've hit red at five hundred paces."

"At night?" Wayne said. "In the mists?"

Marasi fell silent. Then she held out her hand and gestured impatiently for the spyglass. Wayne gave it to her, and she watched six men hop from the phantom train. They walked along the sides of the real train, guns at the ready and watching.

"Distraction?" Wayne asked, watching.

"Lord Waxillium thought so. He said to…" She trailed off.

He said to watch the canal.

She turned, scanning the canal with the spyglass. Something big and dark was floating down it. Shrouded in mists, it looked like some kind of massive beast—a leviathan swimming quietly through the water. It came up to the middle of the train, then halted. A dark, shadowy leg lifted from the black mass. *By the Survivor*, she thought, shivering. *It's alive.*

But no … the leg was too stiff. It moved up, rotated out, then came down. As the thing in the canal stopped, the leg clamped into place on the shore. *For stabilization,* Marasi realized. *That's what made the depression in the ground we saw earlier.*

Once the thing … the machine … was stabilized, some men moved through the darkness to the vault car. They worked for a few moments. Then a large arm rose out of the dark mass on the canal. It swung over toward the tracks, then reached down, grabbed the entire vault car, and *lifted* it.

Marasi gaped. The car was lifted only a few feet, but that was enough. The machine was a crane.

The Vanishers who had unhooked the couplers helped push the train car over across the narrow strip of land toward the canal. The black mass had to be a barge. Marasi ran some quick numbers in her head. In order to lift the train car like that, the barge must be very heavy and have considerable ballast on the other side.

She lifted her spyglass and was pleased to be able to pick out another crane arm extending in the other direction, holding some kind of heavy weight. The barge sank somewhat into the waters as the vault car was lifted, but not as far as Marasi would have assumed. It probably was designed with some means of bottoming out in the canal, perhaps an extendable section underneath the barge. That, plus the stabilizing arm, might be enough.

"My, my, my…" Wayne whispered. "Ain't that somethin'."

The machine dropped the entire vault car onto its barge, and then lifted something else off. Something large and rectangular. She had already guessed what to expect. A replica.

Marasi watched as the duplicate railcar was lowered onto the tracks. The couplings made it *very* tricky. This could ruin their entire plan; lower the car in the wrong way, ruin a coupler, and when the train pulled away it would leave its back half on the tracks. That would make it more obvious what had happened. The Vanishers on the ground guided the process.

Several of the other Vanishers were firing shots through the windows of a passenger car a few places ahead, probably to keep anyone from peeking out. However, the way the tracks bent around a tree-topped hill here, it would be very difficult for anyone inside to get a good view of what was happening. The phantom railcar's light had vanished a few moments ago, and she knew it would be speeding backward along the tracks. Where did they keep it hidden? Perhaps it was loaded onto another barge after getting far enough ahead to be out of sight?

The Vanishers who had been working with the barge were running over to climb back onto their vehicle, which was slipping out into the center of the wide canal, where it was practically invisible in the misty night. It moved as a shadow.

“Wayne!” she said, scrambling up. “We’ve got to go.”

He sighed, standing. “Sure, sure.”

“Waxillium is *in that train car*!”

“Yeah. You ever notice how often he gets to be the one who rides in comfort, while I have to do things like gallop or walk all the time? Not very fair.”

She slung the rifle on her shoulder, hurrying down the hill. “You know, when I was reading the reports, I never imagined that you’d complain this much.”

“Now, that’s not fair. I’ll have you know that I pride myself on my cheery, optimistic attitude.”

She stopped, looking back at him, raising an eyebrow. “You pride yourself on it?”

He raised a hand to his chest, adopting a tone that sounded almost priestly. “Yes, but pride is bad, you know. I’ve been trying to be more humble lately. Hurry up, hurry up. We’re gonna lose them. You want Wax to be cornered and alone? Gosh, woman.”

She shook her head, turning and continuing down the hillside to where their horses were tied.

* * *

Miles stood with hands clasped behind his back, riding on the front of the Machine as it slid quietly down the canal. The part crane, part barge wasn’t exactly what he’d envisioned when he’d explained his plot to Mister Suit, but it was close.

He was proud of what he’d done: not just become a thief, but become one that captured people’s imaginations. Suit could say what he wanted about the theatrics, but they worked. The constables had no idea how he was performing the thefts.

“They checked on all six of the Tekiel guards, boss,” Tarson said, stepping up to him. His arm was out of its sling. Pewter savants could heal quickly. Not as quickly as someone like Miles, but it was still remarkable. Of course, pewter savants were also likely to run themselves to death, never noticing that their body was exhausted. It was a dangerous art that burned men up as quickly as Allomancers burned metal.

“Engineers too,” Tarson continued. “They caught a few more guards in the last passenger car, trying to sneak out to see how we were getting the cargo. We shot them. I think that means we’re clean.”

“Not yet,” Miles said softly, staring forward into the darkness as they sailed through the mists, moving by way of a pair of slow-turning propellers underneath the barge. “Waxillium knows how we’re doing this.”

Tarson hesitated. “Uh … you sure?”

“Yes,” Miles said absently. “He’s inside the train car.”

“What!” Tarson spun, looking at the large car riding in the middle of the barge. Miles could hear members of his team covering it with a tarp, to obscure it as they approached the City. They’d look like an ordinary barge, the arms and ballast hidden under other tarps and the whole thing disguised to look like a shipment of stone from one of the outer quarries. Miles even had a shipping manifest and docking authorization, along with a few tarps that actually hid piles of neatly cut stone.

“I don’t know the method he used,” Miles said. “But he’ll be in there. Wax thinks like a lawkeeper. This is the best way to find our hideout—stay with the cargo you know will be stolen, even if you’re not sure precisely how.” He paused. “No. He’ll have guessed how we’re doing it. That’s the risk of being as good as he is. As good as I was. You start to think like a criminal.”

Better than a criminal, really.

In a way, it was surprising that more lawkeepers didn’t end up turning to crime. If you saw something done wrong frequently enough, you’d—by nature—want to see it finally done right. Miles had started planning these robberies in the back of his mind ten years ago, when he’d realized that railway security was focused on the railcars. At first it had been just a thought experiment. That was another thing to be proud of. He had robbed, and he’d done it well. Very well. And the people … he’d gone through the city, listening. They spoke with awe of the Vanishers.

They’d never treated him like that back in the Roughs. They’d hated him while he’d protected him. Now they loved him while he stole from him. People were baffling, but it felt good not to be hated. Feared, yes. But not hated.

“So what are we going to do?” Tarson asked.

“Nothing,” Miles said. “Wax likely doesn’t realize I’ve guessed he’s there. That gives us an advantage.”

“But…”

“We can’t open the railcar here,” Miles said. “That’s the entire point of the thing. We’ll need the workshop.” He paused. “Though I suppose we could just dump the entire car into the canal. It’s deep enough here to sink entirely. I wonder if Wax has a plan to open the door if something like that happens.”

“I don’t think Mister Suit would much like us sinking the train car, boss,” Tarson said. “Not after what he must have spent to make that replica.”

“Yes. Unfortunately, the canal is only about fourteen feet deep. If we dumped the car, we’d never get it back out before another ship’s hull collided with it, revealing what we’ve done. Pity.”

Waxillium’s death would almost be worth the loss of the cargo. Mister Suit didn’t realize how dangerous the man was. Oh, he *acted* like he did. But if he had really appreciated how dangerous, how *effective*, Waxillium was … well, he’d never have allowed this robbery. He’d have stopped all operations and pulled out of the city. And Miles would have agreed with the move, save for one thing.

That would have meant no confrontation.

They floated into the City, carrying the train car, its cargo, and its occupant—almost as if Wax were a lord in his grand carriage. His was a nearly impregnable fortress that protected him from the dozen or so men on the barge who would happily have killed him.

Mister Suit’s two minders—who called themselves Push and Pull—joined Miles at the front of the barge, but he didn’t speak to them. Together, they drifted through Elendel. Streetlights were lines of fire in the mists, bright white, running along the canal. Other lights sparkled high in the sky, the windows of buildings that were shrouded in the mist.

Nearby, some of his men were muttering. The mists were considered bad luck by most, though at least two of the major religions accepted them as manifestations of the divine. Miles had never been certain how to think of them. They made Allomancy stronger, or so some claimed, but his abilities were already as strong as they could be.

The Church of the Survivor taught that the mists belonged to him, Kelsier, Lord of Mists. He appeared on nights when the mist was thick and gave his blessing to the independent. Whether they be thieves, scholars, anarchists, or a farmer who lived on his own land. Anyone who survived on his own—or who thought for himself—was someone who followed the Survivor, whether he knew it or not.

That's another thing the current establishment makes a mockery of, Miles thought. Many of them claimed to belong to the Church of the Survivor, but discouraged their employees from thinking for themselves. Miles shook his head. Well, he no longer followed the Survivor. He'd found something better, something that felt more true.

They sailed down past the outer ring of the Fourth and Fifth Octants. Two massive buildings rose up opposite one another across the canal. The tops disappeared into the mists. Tekiel Tower was on one side, the Ironspine on the other.

The freight dock for the Ironspine was alongside its own branch from the canal. They steered the barge into it, gliding to a stop, then used the dock's stationary crane to lift the hidden train car off the barge. It was supposed to be a big pile of rock, after all. They slowly swung it into the air, then over and gently down onto the platform.

Miles jumped off the barge and onto the ground and walked to the platform, joined by Push and Pull. The rest of his men filed in around him, looking very pleased. Some were joking with one another about the bonus they'd get for the heist.

Clamps looked very disturbed, and he scratched at the scars on his neck. He was a Survivorist, his scars a mark of devotion. Tarson just yawned a wide, gray-lipped yawn, then cracked his knuckles.

The entire platform shook, then began to move, descending one story into the foundry hall. Once they passed through, the doors closed above. The lift lurched slightly as it came to a stop. Miles looked to the side, down the long tunnel that Mister Suit claimed would someday provide train access under the city. It looked hollow, empty, lifeless.

"Hook up the chains," Miles said, hopping off the platform. "Fix the train car in place."

“Couldn’t we just wait?” Tarson asked, frowning. “It’ll open in twelve hours, right?”

“I plan to be gone in twelve hours,” Miles said. “Wax and his people are too close. We’re going to crack that car open, deal with whoever’s inside, then grab the aluminum and go. Get to work; let’s rip the door off.”

His men hastened to obey, tying the large train car to the wall with a large number of clamps and chains. Another set of chains was hooked to the Breaknaught’s door; these chains wrapped around the same powerful electric winching mechanism that raised and lowered the platform. The platform shook as it was disengaged, the motors instead engaging the chain wheels.

Miles walked to the gun rack, selecting two aluminum handguns identical to the ones in his holsters. He was disturbed to notice that there was only one other gun on the rack. They’d lost a fortune in weaponry. Well, he’d just have to see that Waxillium was duly repaid. Miles strode through the room, chains clinking on the floor and men grunting. The air smelled of coke from the inactive forges.

“Arm up!” Miles ordered. “Get ready to fire on the person inside the moment we open the thing.”

The Vanishers glanced at one another, confused, but then unslung or unholstered guns. He had about a dozen of them here, with some others in reserve. Just in case. Never put all your bullets in the same gun when Waxillium was around.

“But boss,” one of the Vanishers called, “the report said the train left without the guards inside!”

Miles cocked his gun. “If you find a building without rats, son, then you know that something more dangerous scared them away.”

“You think he’s in there?” Push said in a near monotone, stepping up beside him. Obviously, he hadn’t heard Miles’s conversation about Wax on the barge.

Miles nodded.

“And you brought him here.”

Miles nodded again.

Push’s face darkened. “You should have told us.”

“You were given to me to help deal with him,” Miles said. “I just wanted to see you boys get your chance.” He turned. “Start the motor!”

One of the men pulled the lever, and the chains grew taut. They groaned, pulling against the door. The train car rattled, but was kept in place by the other chains behind.

“Be ready!” Miles called. “When the door opens, fire at anything that so much as *quivers* inside that car. Arm yourselves *only* with aluminum, and don’t save ammunition. We can collect the bullets later and recast them.”

The train’s door buckled in its mountings, the metal groaning. Miles and his men moved out to the sides, away from the path of the chains. Three hastily went to set up the rotary gun, but Miles waved them down. They didn’t have aluminum bullets for that, so firing it could be a disaster against a prepared Coinshot.

Miles refocused his attention on the vault car. He stilled his breath and felt his body grow warm as he increased the power he was tapping from his metalmind. He didn’t need to breathe. His body renewed itself each moment. He’d stop his heartbeat if he could. A heartbeat was such an annoyance when trying to aim.

Even without breathing, he’d never been able to shoot as well as Wax. Of course, nobody could. The man seemed to have an inborn instinct for firearms. Miles had seen him make shots he’d have sworn were impossible. It almost seemed a shame to kill such a man. It would be like burning a one-of-a-kind painting, a masterpiece.

But it was what had to be done. Miles extended his arm, sighting with the revolver. The door continued to warp, and the links in several of the chains began to show strain. But there were enough of them, and the motor was strong enough, that the door’s bindings began to break. Scraps of metal sprang free, bolts snapping. One took Miles on the cheek, ripping skin. The cut regrew itself immediately. No pain. He only faintly remembered what pain felt like.

Then the door gave a final screech of death, ripping free and flying across the room. It hit the ground, spraying sparks and skidding as the man at the lever hastily stopped the engine. The door came to a rest between the Vanishers, who nervously trained their weapons on the dark interior of the car.

Come on, Wax, Miles thought. *Play your hand. You’ve come to me. Into my den, into my lair. You’re mine now.*

Poor fool. Wax never could stop himself if a woman was in danger.

That was when Miles noticed the string. Thin, almost invisible, it led from the fallen door to the inside of the railcar. It must have been tied to the door, then set inside in a loose pile with lots of slack. When they yanked the door off, the string didn’t snap, but was strung out along behind. What …

Miles glanced again at the fallen door. Tape. Dynamite.

Aw, hell.

Someone inside the train car—hiding behind the box of aluminum—pulled the string tight with a sudden jerk.

18

Outside, the entire room shook. Inside, the train car lurched—though it appeared someone had been kind enough to secure it in place, preventing Waxillium from being thrown about too much. He held on to the rope he'd tied around the strongbox, head down, Vindication up beside his ear.

As soon as the blast wave passed, he threw himself over the top of the box and ducked out into the room. Smoke churned in the air; bits of stone and steel were scattered across the floor. Most of the lights had been knocked out by the explosion, and those that remained were swinging wildly, painting the room with bewildering shadows.

Waxillium scanned the devastation and did a quick count. At least four men down. He probably could have hit more if he'd detonated the explosion earlier, but he'd worried about hurting innocents. He'd needed a moment to glance out and make sure that Steris or others weren't near.

Waxillium Pushed up and backward off a scrap of metal, throwing himself into the air before any Vanishers could draw a bead on him. He aimed Vindication as he flew, shooting one man who was rising and shaking his head. Waxillium landed atop the train car and fired twice more with precision, killing two more Vanishers.

A ragged figure stood up on the side of the room, and Waxillium shot just before he recognized Miles. The left side of his suit coat and shirt had been shredded, but he'd already regrown his flesh, and now was lifting a gun of his own.

Damn, Waxillium thought, dropping down behind the wrecked train car. He'd been hoping to find himself in a more traditional hideout, with narrow hallways and hidden nooks. Not this open stone pen of a room. It was going to be hard not to get boxed in here.

He glanced around the side of the railcar, and was met with a hail of fire from four or five different places. He ducked back around, hastily reloading Vindication with ordinary rounds. He was pinned down already. This was *not* going well.

Another of the room's lights flickered, then went out. Fires started by the explosion illuminated the room with a primal red glow. Waxillium crouched down, Vindication held ready. He didn't bother with a steel bubble; they were all firing aluminum bullets.

It was either get pinned down and killed as they rounded the railcar, or risk getting shot as he broke out. So be it. He kicked up a chunk of metal, then Pushed it in front of him. It drew gunfire as he charged after it, Pushing behind himself to rise soaring through the air. He turned sideways, firing as he flew, mostly to force the enemy to keep their heads down. He managed to shoot one, however, before hitting the ground and sliding into the shadow of some fallen boxes.

He righted himself and reloaded hastily. His side was aching, bleeding through the bandage. The railcar was affixed to the north side of the room. He'd dashed out to the west, and had ended up in the northwestern corner of the room where the boxes were stacked. The western side, a little bit to the south of him, opened on some kind of tunnel. Maybe he could run that way.

He ducked around the side of the boxes and plugged one of the Vanishers in the forehead. Then he rolled into cover behind a larger stack of crates.

Someone was creeping around the boxes to his left; he could hear their steps crunching on bits of rubble from the explosion. Waxillium raised his gun, stepped to the side, and fired.

The black-suited man raised a casual hand. Tracking the bullet with the blue lines of an Allomancer, Waxillium could see it get flung back and hit the wall above him. *Great. A Coinshot.* He rolled Vindication's cylinder, locking it into place. Unfortunately, fire from the other Vanishers forced him back down before he could shoot the special round.

That Coinshot was close. Waxillium had to move quickly. He grabbed a few of the weighted kerchiefs from his pockets and threw them out with Pushes to draw fire, then worked his way around the right side of the boxes. He had to keep in motion. It—

He came face-to-face with someone moving around the boxes to flank him. The lean man had ashen skin and wore Wayne's hat. Tarson, he'd been called at the other fight.

Tarson’s eyes widened in surprise and he swung a fist—never mind that it was holding a revolver. The man was koloss-blooded, maybe a Pewterarm as well, considering how easily he’d recovered from being shot. Men like that often punched first and thought about their guns second.

Waxillium barely pulled back in time; he felt the fist brush past the tip of his nose, then collide with one of the boxes, smashing it. He raised Vindication, but Tarson—moving with supernatural quickness—slapped it out of his hand. Yes, a Pewterarm for certain. Koloss-blooded men were strong, but not nearly that fast.

Reflexively, Waxillium Pushed himself backward. Going hand-to-hand with this man would be suicide. It—

The roof exploded.

Well, not the entire roof. Just the portion above Waxillium, where it looked like the train car had been lowered on some kind of mechanical platform. Waxillium ducked down as pieces of metal dropped; he Pushed some away. Gunfire erupted above, and the Pewterarm ducked back before it, as a few bullets hit the boxes nearby.

A figure dropped from above, wearing a duster and holding a pair of dueling canes. Wayne hit hard right beside Waxillium, grunting in pain, and the distinctive shimmer of a speed bubble popped up around them.

“Ouch,” Wayne said, rolling over and stretching out his leg, letting it heal from fracturing.

“You didn’t need to jump down so quickly,” Waxillium said.

“Oh yeah? Look up, muffin-brains.”

Waxillium glanced upward. While he’d been fighting the Pewterarm, the black-suited Coinshot had advanced. The man was landing in slow motion atop the crates, revolver in hand, a puff of smoke coming out as a bullet slowly left the barrel. That barrel was pointed right at Waxillium’s head.

Waxillium shivered, then took a deliberate step to the side. “Thanks. And … muffin-brains?”

“Tryin’ out better insults,” Wayne said climbing to his feet. “You like the new duster?”

“Is *that* what took you so long? Please tell me you didn’t go shopping while I was fighting for my life.”

“Had to take out three gits what was guarding the entrance up above,” Wayne said, spinning his dueling canes. “One of them had this fine garment upon his person.” He hesitated. “I’m a little late ’cause I was trying to figure a way to beat him up without ruining the coat.”

“Great.”

“Had Marasi shoot ’im in the foot,” Wayne said, grinning. “You ready to do this thing? I’ll try to take our friend with the koloss blood there.”

“Be careful,” Waxillium said. “He’s a Pewterarm.”

“Charming. Y’always do introduce me to the most lovely of folks, Wax. Marasi’s going to cover us from above, keep the gunmen pinned down. Can you handle the Coinshot?”

“If I can’t, it’s time to retire.”

“Oh. Is that what we’re calling ‘getting shot’ these days? I’ll remember that. Ready?”

“Go.”

Wayne dropped the speed bubble and rolled forward, surprising the Pewterarm as he came around the boxes. The Coinshot’s bullet hit the ground. Waxillium jumped for Vindication, which had fallen onto a nearby box after being knocked from his hand.

The Coinshot moved by reflex, jumping down and Pushing on the gun. Ranette was many things, but rich wasn’t one of them—and so Vindication wasn’t made of aluminum. The Coinshot’s Push threw the gun right at Waxillium’s head. He cursed, ducking, letting the gun pass above. He had other guns, of course, but they had only ordinary bullets.

Guessing the Coinshot was trying to slam the gun into the wall and break it, Waxillium Pushed upward with everything he had, sending the gun soaring up through the hole in the ceiling.

Waxillium followed it, dropping a round and launching himself after his weapon. The Coinshot tried to fire on him, but a well-placed shot from Marasi—she was using aluminum bullets herself—nearly took him in the head, causing him to duck away.

Waxillium passed into a wave of mist that was falling into the room like a waterfall. He burst into the dark, misty night sky and snatched Vindication from the air. He Pushed himself sideways off a lamppost as bullets zipped up after him, leaving trails in the mist.

He hit the building beside him and grabbed hold. Something dark soared out of the hole and into the air. The Coinshot. He was joined by a second man wearing black, also some kind of Allomancer, though the trajectory of his flight looked more like that of a Lurcher.

Great. Waxillium pointed his gun downward and drove an ordinary bullet into the ground, then Pushed down on it while decreasing his weight to drive himself into the sky. The other two followed in graceful leaps, and Waxillium rolled the cylinder of Vindication and locked it on to the special chamber.

Goodbye, he thought, firing right at the Coinshot's head.

By sheer chance, the man happened to Push himself to the side just at that moment. It hadn't been a deliberate dodge, just a lucky motion. The bullet streaked uselessly into the mists past the man, who raised his own gun and fired a pair of shots, one of which clipped the side of Waxillium's arm.

Waxillium cursed as his blood sprayed into the dark night, then Pushed himself off to the side to move erratically and avoid their fire. *Idiot!* he thought, angry. *Doesn't matter how good your bullets are if you don't aim carefully.*

He concentrated on staying ahead of the other two, jumping back and forth up the side of the enormous Ironspine Building. The Coinshot moved in graceful leaps after him, while the Lurcher was more direct, Pulling himself on the metal in the building's steel frame in bursts. He'd jump outward, then Pull himself upward and back toward the building, like a strange inverse rappeller.

Both saved their bullets, waiting for the right shot. Waxillium did the same, but for a different reason; he wasn't certain firing on them would do any good. He needed to load another hazekiller round. And, if possible, he needed to split up the two Allomancers so he could deal with them one at a time.

He worked his way upward, pushing off the steel beneath the stone in the ledges he landed upon. He soon ran into the same problem as the first time he'd climbed this building. It grew narrower at the top, and he could go only up and out, not in. This time, he didn't have his shotguns. He'd given those to Tillaume.

He did have that other hazekiller round, the one built to hit a Pewterarm especially hard. He hesitated—should he save it for the man below?

No. If he died now, he'd never have another chance to face the man below. Waxillium reached out, pulling the trigger and thrusting himself backward. It wasn't as powerful as the shotgun, but as light as he was, it did nudge him back toward the building.

The Coinshot blew right past him in the air, looking surprised. The man leveled his gun, but Waxillium fired first. An ordinary round—but the Coinshot was forced to Push against it to keep it away. Waxillium Pushed at the same time, and that shoved him to the building. The unfortunate Coinshot was launched out into the sky away from the tower.

Good, Waxillium thought. Now over a hundred feet in the air, he grabbed the facade. He fired down at the Lurcher, but the man was Pulling carefully. Waxillium's bullet arced and hit the plate on the Lurcher's chest.

Waxillium hesitated for a moment, then let go of the wall, balancing as he pulled his other revolver out of his second shoulder holster.

He emptied it, firing all six rounds in rapid succession. The Lurcher turned, angling his chest toward Waxillium, sparks flying as the bullets hit his breastplate. Luck wasn't with Waxillium—sometimes you could kill a Lurcher that way, as one of the bullets ricocheted toward his face or the plate at his chest got knocked free. Not this night.

Cursing, Waxillium threw himself out into the air and dropped past the man. The Lurcher jumped out into the air after him. They plunged through the mists.

Waxillium fired a shot downward to slow himself right before he hit the ground. He needed to get a shot at the Lurcher at just the right angle to—

A second shot cracked in the air, and the Lurcher screamed. Waxillium twisted, raising his gun, but the Lurcher hit the ground face-first, already bleeding.

Marasi popped up from a shrub next to him. "Oh! That looks like it hurt." She winced, looking concerned for the man she'd just shot with an aluminum rifle round.

"Hurting is kind of the idea, Marasi."

"Targets don't scream."

"Technically, he was a target too." *And many thanks to Wayne for grabbing the wrong bullets back after the wedding dinner.* He hesitated. What was he forgetting?

The Coinshot.

Waxillium cursed, dropping the empty ordinary pistol and grabbing Marasi. He ducked into the opening as a spray of gunfire came from the mists, narrowly missing them. Waxillium carried her down into the room, landing softly.

The lower chamber was a scene of chaos. Men lay broken on the floor, some dead from the blast, others fallen to Waxillium's shots. A large group of Vanishers had set up near the western tunnel, firing out at Wayne—who was in full form, burning through his bendalloy like a madman. He'd appear, draw fire, then vanish into a blur, and appear right next to where he'd been. He called insults as the bullets missed him, then moved again.

The gunmen kept trying to guess where he'd appear next, but that was a fruitless game. Wayne could slow time, see where the bullets were heading, then walk to a place where they wouldn't hit. It took a great deal of luck and skill to hit a Slider who knew you were there.

Impressive as it was, though, it was a delaying tactic. With so many men firing on him, Wayne couldn't risk moving any closer. He had to wait momentarily between creating speed bubbles, and if he was too close to the men, there was a good chance they'd be able to aim, shoot, and hit him in the seconds that he was exposed. The longer Wayne tried to dodge, the better the men shooting at him would get at judging the pauses. If he tried it too long, he'd get hit.

Waxillium took in the scene, then held out a hand to Marasi. "Dynamite."

She handed him her stick.

"Find cover. Try and hit that Coinshot when he comes down for us." Waxillium dashed into the room, firing without looking toward the group of men. They cried out, ducking for cover. Waxillium reached Wayne as a speed bubble went up.

"Thanks," Wayne said. Streaks of sweat ran down the sides of his face, though he was grinning.

"The Pewterarm?" Waxillium asked.

"We fought to a standstill," Wayne said. "Bastard is *fast*."

Waxillium nodded. Pewter burners always gave Wayne trouble. Wayne could heal far more quickly, but the Pewterarm's powers made him fast and strong. In a hand-to-hand fight, Wayne was at the disadvantage.

"He still has my lucky hat," Wayne noted, nodding to where the gray-skinned man stood behind the group of Vanishers, egging them on. "This latest group came from that tunnel. I think there are more down there. Don't know why Miles hasn't brought them in."

"Too many guns firing in a room this size gets more and more dangerous for his men," Waxillium said, looking about. "He'll want reserves, try to wear us down. Where is Miles, by the way?"

“Trying to flank me,” Wayne said. “I think he’s hiding to the side of the train car there.”

Wayne and he stood in the center of the room, train car behind and to the left, boxes and crates behind and to the right, tunnel to the right.

Waxillium could reach the train car pretty easily. “Great,” he said. “First plan to deal with Miles is still a go.”

“I don’t think it’ll work.”

“That’s why we have a second plan. But let’s hope this one does work. I’d rather not put Marasi in more danger.” Waxillium held up the dynamite. There was no fuse—it was meant to be set off by pulling a detonator. “You go for those men. I’ve got Miles. Ready?”

“Yup.”

Waxillium tossed the dynamite and Wayne dropped the speed bubble right before the dynamite hit the border. Any object—small ones particularly—that left a speed bubble was deflected slightly in an unpredictable way. That was why firing bullets out of one was practically useless.

The Vanishers looked up from their hiding places. The dynamite fell toward them. Waxillium leveled Vindication and fired the last bullet in the cylinder at the falling dynamite.

The explosion shook the room, loud enough to set Waxillium’s ears ringing. He spun, ignoring that, to see Miles step out from beside the broken train car. Waxillium grabbed a handful of rounds and ran for the vault car, hastily ducking inside to find cover as he reloaded.

A figure darkened the doorway a moment later. “Hello, Wax,” Miles said. He stepped up into the vault car.

“Hello, Miles.” Taking a deep breath, Waxillium Pushed against the metal hooks above, which he’d affixed there to hold the nets in place. They sprang free, dropping the nets around Miles.

As Miles jerked about in surprise, Waxillium Pushed on the clasps at the bottom of the nets, shooting them out of the gaping hole where the door had been. That pulled the nets tight at the bottom and yanked Miles’s feet out from under him.

Miles hit the floor of the railcar’s interior, banging his head against the box that held the aluminum. That probably wouldn’t even daze him, but the awkward fall *did* make him drop his gun. Waxillium leaped forward, grabbing it and pulling it out of the nets; then he stood, breathing quickly.

Miles thrashed at the nets. Despite his incredible healing powers, he wasn't any stronger than an ordinary man. The trick wasn't to kill him. It was just to incapacitate him. Waxillium stepped forward, only now finding a chance to bind the wound on his arm. It wasn't bad, but it was bleeding more than he'd have liked.

Miles looked up at him, growing calm. Then he reached into his pocket, got out his cigar case, and pulled a small, slender stick of dynamite from it.

Waxillium froze. He felt an awful moment of realization, followed by a jolt of terror.

Aw, hell! He threw himself past Miles and out of the railcar. The awkward leap left him spinning in the air. He had a brief glance of Miles yanking at the dynamite's blasting cap. The man was enveloped in a bright, powerful blast.

The explosion hurled Waxillium forward like a leaf before the wind. He smashed to the ground, and his vision flashed. He lost a few moments.

He came to, bloodied, dazed, rolling to a stop. His head swam. He was unable to move or even think, his heart thumping in his chest.

A figure stood up in the railcar. Waxillium's vision was too blurry to make out much, but he knew it was Miles. His clothing had been shredded, much of it blown off his body, but he was whole. He'd set off dynamite in his *hand* in order to free himself from the nets.

Rust and Ruin … Waxillium thought, coughing. How badly was he hurt? He rolled over, numb. That wasn't a good sign.

"Is there any doubt that I have been chosen for something great?" Miles bellowed. Waxillium could barely hear it; his ears were nearly useless after that blast. "Why else would I have this power, Waxillium? Why else would *we* be what we are? And yet, we let others rule. Let them make a mess of our world while we do nothing but chase petty criminals."

Miles hopped down from the train car, then strode forward, bare-chested, trousers hanging in rags. "I am tired of doing what the city tells me. I should be helping people, not fighting meaningless fights as prescribed by the corrupt and the uncaring."

He reached Waxillium, leaning down. "Can't you see? Can't you see what important work we could be doing? Can't you see that we're *meant* to be doing it, perhaps even ruling. It's almost like … like we, with the powers we have, are divine." He seemed to almost be begging for Waxillium to agree, to give him justification.

Waxillium just coughed.

“Bah,” Miles said, straightening up. He flexed a hand. “You don’t think I realize that the only way to stop me is to tie me up? A little explosion can serve a man so well, I’ve found. I keep the dynamite in the cigar cases. Few people look there. You should have questioned the criminals I caught back in the Roughs. A few of them tried capturing me with ropes.”

“I…” Waxillium coughed. His own voice sounded wrong in his ears. “I couldn’t have talked to any of the criminals you caught. You killed them all, Miles.”

“So I did,” Miles said. He grabbed Waxillium by the shoulder, hauling him to his feet. “I see you dropped my gun as you jumped out of the train. Wonderful.” He punched Waxillium in the stomach, causing him to exhale with a grunt. Then Miles let him fall to the ground, wandering over toward a gun lying nearby.

Dazed, but knowing he needed to get to cover, Waxillium somehow lurched to his feet. He Pushed against a piece of machinery and sent himself sailing across the room, where he landed beside the boxes. Those had been scattered in the blast, but they still provided some protection.

Coughing, bleeding, he crawled behind them. Then he collapsed.

* * *

Wayne spun between two Vanishers. He brought his dueling canes to the side, slamming them into the back of one of the men. He was rewarded with a satisfying *crack*. The man fell.

Wayne grinned, dropping his speed bubble. The other man who had been trapped in it with him spun about, trying to draw a bead on Wayne—but while sped up, he’d inadvertently moved into the path of several of his comrades who’d been firing.

The Vanisher fell to a spray of bullets. Wayne jumped back, erecting another bubble around just him and one confused Vanisher.

Everything outside slowed—bullets stilled in the air, shouts vanished, the waves diffusing as they hit the speed bubble. That did strange things to sound. Wayne spun about and knocked the gun out of the hands of the Vanisher behind him, then lunged forward and rammed the end of a cane into the man’s neck. The man gurgled in surprise; then Wayne smacked him on the side of the head, dropping him.

He stepped back, puffing and spinning one of his canes. His bendalloy was running low, so he ate another bit. His last. More worrisome were his metalminds, which were almost completely spent. *Again*. He hated fighting that way. A single gunshot could end him. He was as fragile as … well, everyone else. It was most disturbing.

He stepped up to the perimeter of his speed bubble, wishing it would move with him. That Pewterarm was still wearing Wayne's lucky hat; the man had ducked behind cover when Wax had thrown the dynamite, and had only just emerged. He didn't appear to have been injured badly; a few scrapes to his face, the sort of thing a Pewterarm could ignore. Too bad. But at least the hat was doing all right.

The man had begun to charge toward Wayne, moving extremely slowly, yet noticeably faster than the other Vanishers. It was frustrating, but Wayne knew he had to stay away from the man. He'd never beaten a Pewterarm without a lot of health stored up. Better to keep jumping around, keeping the man confused until Marasi or Wax could shoot him a few times.

Wayne turned and scanned the area nearby, choosing where he should stand as he dropped the bubble. With so many bullets being fired, he didn't want to …

Was that *Wax*?

Wayne gaped, only now noticing Waxillium's bloodied form hurtling across the room, as if by a Steelpush. Wax was pointed toward a group of boxes on the northwestern side of the room, to Wayne's left. His suit had been shredded and burned along one side. Another explosion? Wayne thought he'd heard something, but jumping in and out of speed bubbles could really play havoc with sounds.

Wax needed him. Time to end this fighting, then. Wayne dropped the bubble and dashed forward. He counted to two, then put up another bubble and dodged right. He dropped it and kept running, bullets streaking through the air where he had been. To the eyes of those trying to track him, he'd have blurred and appeared immediately to the right of where he'd just been. He did it again, dodging back in another direction, then dropped the bubble.

Almost there. Another bubble up, and—

Something hit Wayne in the arm. He felt the blood before the pain, strangely enough. He cursed, stumbling, and threw up a bubble immediately.

He grabbed his arm. Warm blood squirted between his fingers, and in a panic, he tapped the last smidgen of healing in his metalmind. It wasn't enough to fix the gunshot wound; it barely slowed the bleeding. He turned, noticing another bullet about to hit his speed bubble. He jumped to the side just before it touched the perimeter, zipped through the air in a heartbeat, then hit the other side and slowed again, deflected erratically up toward the ceiling.

Damn, Wayne thought, tying an improvised bandage on his wounded arm. *Someone has very good aim.* He glanced about to find the black-suited Coinshot kneeling beside the wall, holding a familiar-looking rifle, sights on Wayne. The rifle was the one Ranette had given to Marasi. *Well, this is going to hell faster than bendalloy burns.*

He spent a moment of hesitation. Wax was down. But Marasi … what had happened to her? Wayne couldn't spot her anywhere, though the Coinshot had cover beside some machinery, and he had her gun. That spoke loads.

Wax would want him to go help the girl.

Gritting his teeth, Wayne turned and dashed toward the Coinshot.

* * *

Waxillium groaned, stretching against the pain and pulling the small two-shooter from his ankle holster. He'd dropped Vindication in the blast—Ranette was going to kill him for that—and he'd left his other gun up above when grabbing Marasi. He was down to this.

He unsuccessfully tried to cock the tiny pistol with a shaking hand. He didn't dare prod to feel the extent of his wounds. His leg and arm had been flayed.

Mist continued to flood down from the hole above. It had mostly enveloped this side of the room. With despair, Waxillium realized that his two-shooter had been damaged in the blast, and the hammer no longer cocked. Not that it would be of any use against Miles anyway.

He groaned again, leaning his head back against the floor. *I thought I asked for a little help.*

A voice returned to him, distinct and unexpected. *And a little is what you received, I think.*

Waxillium started. *Well … could I have some more, then? Um, please?*

I must be careful in playing favorites, the voice inside his mind replied. *It upsets the balance.*

You're God. Isn't playing favorites kind of the point?

No, the voice replied. *The point is Harmony, creating a way for as many as possible to make their own choices.*

Waxillium lay staring up at the swirling mists. The blast had dazed him worse than he'd thought.

Are you divine, the voice asked of him, *as Miles claims that Allomancers are?*

I … Waxillium thought. *If I were, I doubt I'd be in this much pain.*

Then what are you?

This is a very bizarre conversation, Waxillium thought back.

Yes.

How can you see things like what has been done by the Vanishers, Waxillium asked, *and not do something to help?*

I have *done something to help. I sent you.*

Waxillium breathed out, blowing the mists in front of him. What Miles had said bothered him: *Is there any doubt we've been given this for a reason?*

Waxillium gritted his teeth, then forced himself to stand. He felt better in the mists. The wounds didn't seem so bad. The pain didn't seem so sharp. But he was still unarmed. Still cornered. Still …

Suddenly he recognized the box right in front of him. It was his own trunk. The one he'd taken with him when first leaving for the Roughs, twenty years ago. The one—now battered and aged—he'd brought back with him to the City.

The one he'd filled with his guns on that night months ago. There was a tassel from a mistcoat hanging out of one side.

You're welcome, the voice whispered.

* * *

Marasi hid in the shadows behind the broken train car, anxious, her heart pounding. The Coinshot had come hunting her after what she'd done to his friend. With his Allomancy, he'd have been able to see her wherever she ran, despite the darkness and the mist, so she'd tucked the rifle behind a few boxes and hid elsewhere.

It felt cowardly, but it had worked. He'd shot a few times into the boxes, then walked around and picked up the gun, looking baffled. He'd obviously expected to find her bleeding and dead.

Instead, she was simply unarmed. She had to get to a weapon, had to do *something*. Wayne had been shot; he'd lured the Coinshot away, but he'd been dripping blood when she'd seen him.

The room was chaos, and it left her disoriented. Wayne had told her that the dynamite sticks they had were relatively small ones, but detonating them in close confines was still enormously, painfully loud. The gunshots were nearly so. The air smelled of smoke, and when gunshots weren't sounding, she could faintly hear men groaning and cursing and dying.

Before the Vanishers had appeared at the wedding dinner, she'd never been in any kind of fight. Now she didn't know what to do; she'd even lost track of which direction was which. The room was dark, lit only by flickering flames, and the mists made apparitions around her.

Some Vanishers were huddled together, guarding the mouth of the tunnel with the koloss-blooded man. She could barely make them out when she peered out of her hiding place. They held their guns leveled. She couldn't go that way.

A figure strode from the darkness nearby, and she barely held in a gasp. She recognized Miles Hundredlives from his description. Narrow face, short dark hair. He was stripped to the waist, exposing a powerful chest. His trousers were in tatters. He was counting the bullets in a revolver, and was the only one in the room who wasn't creeping or cowering. His legs kicked up mist, which now coated the floor.

He stopped by the Vanishers at the mouth of the tunnel and said something she couldn't hear. They ducked away, retreating down the passage. Miles didn't follow them, but strode through the room, getting closer to Marasi. She held her breath, hoping he'd pass closely enough to her hiding place for …

A rustle of cloth sounded, and the Coinshot dropped into place beside Miles. Miles stopped, raising an eyebrow.

"Pull is dead," the Coinshot said. Marasi could barely hear him, but she could tell that his voice was taut with anger. "I've been trying to end the short one. He keeps leading me on chases through the room."

"I believe I have said before," Miles said, voice loud and bold, "that Wayne and Waxillium are like rats. Chasing them is useless. You need to draw them to you."

Marasi leaned forward, breathing shallowly, as quietly as she could. Miles was almost close enough. A few more steps …

Miles snapped his revolver closed. "Waxillium crawled somewhere. I lost him, but he's wounded and unarmed." Then Miles turned and pointed the revolver directly at Marasi's hiding place. "Call for him if you would, Lady Marasi."

She froze, feeling a sharp stab of horror. Miles's face was calm. Icy. Emotionless. He would kill her without a second thought.

"Call for him," Miles said more firmly. "Scream."

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She could only stare at that gun. Her training in the university told her to do as he ordered, then run the moment he turned away. But she couldn't move.

The mist-shrouded shadows at the corner of the room began to shift. She ripped her gaze away from Miles. Something dark moved in the mists. A man, standing up tall.

The mists seemed to draw back. Waxillium stood there, wearing a large, dusterlike coat, cut into strips below the waist. A pair of revolvers gleamed in holsters at his hips, and he rested a shotgun on each shoulder. His face was bloodied, but he was smiling.

Without saying a word, he lowered the shotguns and blasted Miles in the side.

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Shooting Miles was, of course, useless. The man could survive a dynamite explosion at close range. He could take a few shotgun blasts.

But the shots caused the Coinshot to Push himself away in alarm. They also left Miles sprayed with metal. Wax increased his weight and Pushed, though he found it hard to get a purchase on the birdshot. Any metal that pierced a person's body or touched his blood was very difficult to affect with Allomancy.

Fortunately, Miles's body obliged him by healing itself and spitting out the birdshot. In the instant before it could drop to the floor, Wax's Push suddenly found anchors, and he threw Miles across the room and into the wall.

The Coinshot landed on the other side of the room. Waxillium dashed forward, mistcoat flapping. Damn, but it felt good to be wearing one of those again. He skidded to a stop beside Marasi, taking cover next to the railcar.

"I almost had him," Marasi said.

"Waxillium!" Miles bellowed, his voice echoing in the room. "All you do is stall. Well, know *this*. My men have gone to kill the woman you came here to save. If you want her to live, give yourself to me. We—"

His voice cut off strangely. Wax frowned as something moved behind Marasi. She jumped, and Wax pointed a shotgun, but it turned out to be Wayne.

"Hey," he said, puffing. "Nice gun."

"Thanks," Wax said, shouldering it, noting the speed bubble around them. That was what had stopped Miles's voice. "Your arm?"

Wayne glanced down at the bloody bandage around his left arm. "Not so good. I'm outta healing, lost some blood. I'm slowing, Wax. Slowing too much. You look pretty beat-up yourself.”

“I’ll survive.” Wax’s leg was throbbing, his face scraped up, but he felt surprisingly good. He always felt that way, in the mists.

“The things he’s saying,” Marasi said. “You think he’s telling the truth?”

“He might be, Wax,” Wayne said urgently. “The blokes who was set up in front of the tunnel, they charged off a few shakes back. Looked like they had something important to do.”

“Miles *did* tell them something,” Marasi added.

“Damn,” Wax said, glancing around the corner of the railcar. Miles might be bluffing … but then again, he might not be. It wasn’t a chance Wax could take. “That Coinshot is going to make things difficult. We need to take him down.”

“What happened to Ranette’s fancy gun?” Wayne asked.

“Not sure,” Wax said with a grimace.

“Wow. She’s gonna rip out your insides, mate.”

“I’ll be sure to blame you for it,” Wax said, still watching the Coinshot. “He’s good. Dangerous. We’ll never take out Miles unless that Allomancer is dead.”

“But you’ve got those special bullets,” Marasi noted.

“One,” Wax said, slipping a shotgun into its holster inside his coat. He pulled out the other Coinshot round. “I don’t think an ordinary revolver will fire this. I…”

He trailed off, then looked at Marasi. She was raising an eyebrow at him.

“Right,” Wax said. “Can you two keep Miles busy?”

“No problem,” Wayne said.

“Let’s go, then,” Wax said, taking a deep breath. “One last try.”

Wayne met his eyes and nodded. Wax saw tension in his friend’s face. The two of them were battered and bloodied, low on metals, metalminds drained.

But they’d been here before. And this was when they tended to shine their brightest.

As the speed bubble fell, Wax ran out from behind the train car. He tossed the bullet into the air ahead of him, then Pushed on it with a quick snap of power. The Coinshot raised his hand with casual confidence, Pushing it right back at Wax.

The casing and bullet proper broke free and flipped toward Wax, who deflected them easily, but the ceramic tip continued forward. It took the

Coinshot right in the eye.

Bless you, Ranette, Wax thought, leaping up and Pushing off the coins in a fallen Vanisher's pocket. That launched him forward, into the tunnel. There were tracks on the ground here, as if this were built for a train.

Wax frowned in puzzlement, but Pushed on them, heedlessly hurling himself through the darkness until he reached a set of stairs leading upward. The ceiling here was wood; a structure of some sort had been built over the tunnel. He charged into the stairwell, which led up to the wooden building, perhaps a barrack or dormitory.

Wax smiled, the pain of his wounds retreating further as he grew more energetic. He heard footsteps on the wooden floor at the top of the stairwell. They were ready for him. It was a trap, of course.

He found that he didn't care. He unslung both shotguns, then Pushed on the nails in the steps and blasted up the stairwell. He passed the first floor and continued on toward the second—he'd rather check up first, then down. If Steris was being held here, she'd probably be up at the top.

Now we're burning, Wax thought, metal flaring, energy rising. He threw his shoulder against the door at the top of the stairs, breaking out into a second-floor hallway. Feet stomped up the steps behind him and men burst out of rooms nearby, fully armed, wearing no metal.

Wax smiled, raising his shotguns. *All right. Let's do this.*

Wax Pushed hard against the nails in the boards under the feet of the men leveling aluminum guns at him. Planks ripped free by their nails, making the floor tremble, throwing off the Vanishers' aim. He dodged right, rolling out of the hallway and into a room to its side. He came up and spun, leveling both shotguns back at the doorway.

Vanishers from the stairwell piled into the hallway after him, and his arms jerked as he fired twin shotgun blasts. He *Pushed,* slamming the men back and sending himself crashing out the window. This building was more an old warehousing shed; there was no glass in the windows, just shutters.

Wax blasted out into open air. There was a lamppost on the dark street, a little bit to his left. He Pushed on that while at the same time dropping his weight to nearly nothing. The Push sent him back against the outside of the building; he landed and half ran, half leaped parallel to the ground along the wall.

Reaching the next room over from where he'd been, he Pushed on another lamppost and crashed through the window feet-first, splinters spraying around him. He landed and came up in the building, then turned toward the wall between him and the room he'd just left.

He holstered the shotguns and grabbed his revolvers, pulling them out in a cross-armed motion. They were Ranette-made Sterrions, among the best guns he'd ever owned. He raised them and increased his weight, then Pushed hard on the nails in the wall before him.

The cheap wood exploded away, the wall disintegrating into a spray of splinters and planks, nails becoming as deadly as bullets as they ripped into the men in the next room. Wax fired, dropping any that the nails had missed in a storm of splinters, steel, and lead.

A click to his left. Wax spun as a doorknob turned. He didn't wait to see who was beyond. He Pushed on the doorknob, ripping it out of its frame and through the door, into the chest of the Vanisher trying to get in. The door slammed open, and the unfortunate man crashed through the wall of the hallway—there were no rooms on the other side, just the wall of the narrow building—propelled out into the misty night.

Wax holstered the Sterrions, barrels smoking, chambers empty. He pulled out the shotguns, rolling into the hallway and coming up in a crouch. He raised a shotgun in each direction. A few straggling Vanishers climbed up the stairs to his right; another group were leveling weapons to his left.

He Pushed on the twin metal levers on the sides of his shotguns, cocking them with Allomancy. The spent casings flipped out into the air above the guns, and Waxillium fired while Pushing, driving birdshot and spent casings into the waiting Vanishers on either side.

The floor next to Waxillium exploded.

He cursed, throwing himself to the left as gunfire from below blasted chips of wood into the air. They were getting smart, firing at him from underneath. He turned and ran, firing shotgun blasts down through the floor, mists creeping in through the broken walls.

There had to be another dozen Vanishers below. Too many to fire at without being able to see them. A bullet grazed his thigh. He turned and ducked away, leaping over the bodies of the fallen and dashing down the hallway. Bullets chased him, the floor splintering, men calling below as they fired everything they had up at him.

He hit the door at the end of the hallway. It was locked. A healthy dose of increased weight—along with some momentum and a shoulder—fixed that.

He crashed through and found himself in a small windowless room with no other doors.

A short, balding man cowered in one corner. A woman with golden hair and a rumpled ball gown sat on a bench at the back of the room, her eyes red, her face haggard. Steris. She looked utterly dumbfounded as Wax spun through the broken doorway, mistcoat tassels flaring around him. He Pushed on some of the nails in the floor back in the hall, causing the boards there to ripple, drawing much of the gunfire.

"Lord *Waxillium*?" Steris said, shocked.

"Most of me," he said, wincing. "I may have left a toe or two in that hallway." He glanced at the man in the corner. "Who are you?"

"Nouxil."

"The gunsmith," Wax said, tossing him a shotgun.

"I'm not actually a very good shot," the man said, looking terrified. A few bullets blasted up through the floor between them. The Vanishers had realized they'd been tricked. They knew what he was looking for.

"It doesn't matter if you're a good shot," Wax said, raising his empty hand to the back wall and breaking it open with an increased-weight Push. "It matters if you can swim or not."

"What? Of course I can. But why—"

"Hang on tightly," Wax said as more gunshots erupted around him. He Pushed on the shotgun in the gunsmith's hands, flinging him out the opening, throwing him some thirty feet in an arc toward the canal outside.

Wax spun, grabbing Steris as she stood up. "The other girls?" he asked.

"I haven't seen any other captives," she said. "The Vanishers implied they were sent somewhere."

Blast, he thought. Well, he was lucky to find even Steris. He Pushed lightly off the nails in the floor, propelling the two of them toward the ceiling. As they approached, he took advantage of the fact that it didn't matter how heavy an object was when it came to falling. All objects fell at the same rate. That meant that increasing his weight manyfold would not affect his motion.

Raising his shotgun, he shot a concentrated blast of pellets into the ceiling. Then he Pushed on them sharply, his increased weight meaning the Push didn't really move him much—just as when he was lighter, a Push affected him greatly.

The result was that he continued his momentum upward—but his Push blasted a hole in the ceiling. He made himself incredibly light and Pushed more strongly off the nails below. The two of them shot up through the hole he'd made, propelled some forty or fifty feet into the air. He spun in the night, mistcoat tassels splaying outward, smoking shotgun clutched tightly in one arm, Steris in the other. Bullets from below left streaks in the mist as it swirled around them.

Steris gasped, clinging to him. Wax drew every bit of weight he had left, draining his metalminds completely. That was hundreds upon hundreds of hours of weight, enough to make him crush paving stones if he tried to walk on them. In the strange way of Feruchemy, he didn't grow more dense—bullets would still cut through him easily if they hit. But with this incredible conflux of weight, his ability to Push grew incredible.

He used that weight to Push downward with everything he had. There were numerous lines of metal below. Nails. Doorknobs. Guns. Personal effects.

The building trembled, then undulated, then *ripped apart* as every nail in its frame was driven downward as if propelled by a rotary gun. There was an enormous crash. The building was crushed down into the railroad tunnel on top of which it had been built.

The weight was gone from him in an instant, compounded upon itself in that moment, his metalminds drained all at once. Wax let gravity take him, and he dropped through the mists, Steris clinging to him. They landed in the middle of the wreckage at the bottom of the railroad tunnel. Smashed lumber and fragments of furniture were strewn across the floor.

Three Vanishers stood in the mouth of the tunnel, openmouthed. Wax raised the shotgun and cocked it with Allomancy, then laid into them with shotgun blasts. They were the only ones that had still been standing. Everyone else had been crushed down into the tunnel.

A small fire flickered in the corner where a lantern had fallen. By its light, he checked on Steris, the mists pouring down around them and filling the tunnel.

"Oh *Survivor of Mists*!" Steris breathed, cheeks flushed, eyes wide, lips parted as she held to him. She didn't look terrified. If anything, she seemed aroused.

You are a bizarre woman, Steris, Wax thought.

“Do you realize that you have missed your calling, Waxillium?” a voice yelled from within the blackened tunnel. It was Miles. “You are an army unto yourself. You are *wasted* in the life you’ve taken upon yourself.”

“Take this,” Wax said softly to Steris, handing her the shotgun. He cocked it. One shell left. “Hold it tightly. I want you to run for the precinct station. It’s at Fifteenth and Ruman. If one of the Vanishers comes for you, fire the shotgun.”

“But—”

“I don’t expect you to hit him,” Wax said. “I’ll listen for the sound of the shot.”

She tried to comment further, but Wax ducked down to get his center of mass beneath her, then carefully Pushed the shotgun up into her middle. He used it to launch her up and out of the pit. She landed awkwardly, but safely, and hesitated only a moment before running off into the mists.

Wax scrambled to the side, making sure he wasn’t backlit by the fire. He pulled a Sterrion from its holster and fished out some rounds. He reloaded as he crouched down.

“Waxillium?” Miles called from deep inside the tunnel. “If you’re done playing, perhaps you’d like to come settle things.”

Wax crept up to the tunnel mouth, then stepped inside. The mists had filled it, making it difficult to see—which would work equally against Miles. He made his way forward cautiously until he saw the light from the big workshop at the end, where fires still burned.

By that light, he could faintly make out the silhouette of a figure standing in the tunnel, holding a gun to the head of a slender woman. Marasi.

Waxillium froze, pulse accelerating. But no, this was part of the plan. It was perfect. Except …

“I know you’re in there,” Miles’s voice said. Another figure moved, tossing a few improvised torches into the darkness.

With a freezing sense of horror, Waxillium realized that Miles wasn’t the one holding Marasi. He stood too far back. The man holding Marasi was the one named Tarson, the koloss-blooded Pewterarm.

Her face illuminated by wavering torchlight, Marasi looked terrified. Waxillium’s fingers felt slick on the revolver’s grip. The Pewterarm was careful to keep Marasi between himself and Waxillium’s side of the tunnel, gun to the back of her head. He was squat and tough, but not very tall. He was only in his twenties—like all koloss-blooded, he'd continue growing taller throughout his life.

Either way, at the moment, Waxillium couldn't get a bead on him. *Oh, Harmony,* he thought. *It's happening again.*

Something rustled in the darkness nearby. He jumped and nearly shot it until he caught the outline of Wayne's face.

"Sorry about this," Wayne whispered. "When she got grabbed, I thought it was Miles. And so I—"

"It's all right," Waxillium said softly.

"What do we do?" Wayne asked.

"I don't know."

"You always know."

Waxillium was silent.

"I can hear you whispering!" Miles called. He walked forward and tossed another torch.

Just a few steps more, Waxillium thought.

Miles stopped where he was, eyeing the creeping mists with what seemed like distrust. Marasi whimpered. Then she tried jerking, the way she had back at the wedding dinner.

"None of that," Tarson said, holding her carefully. He fired a shot right in front of her face, then brought the gun back to her head. She froze.

Waxillium raised his revolver.

I can't do this. I can't watch another one die. Not by my hand.

"All right," Miles called. "Fine. You want to test me, Wax? I'm counting to three. If I reach three, Tarson shoots, no other warnings. One."

He'll do it, Waxillium realized, feeling helpless, guilty, overwhelmed. *He really will.* Miles didn't need a hostage. If threatening her wouldn't bring Waxillium out, then he wouldn't bother with her.

"Two."

Blood on the bricks. A smiling face.

"Wax?" Wayne whispered, sounding urgent.

Oh, Harmony, if I've ever needed you …

Mist curled around his legs.

"Th—"

"Wayne!" Waxillium yelled, standing.

The speed bubble went up. Tarson would fire in mere moments. Miles behind him, pointing angrily. Torchfire frozen. It was like watching an explosion in slow motion again. Waxillium raised his Sterrion, and found his arm incredibly still.

It had been still on the day he'd shot Lessie, too.

He'd shot her with this very gun.

Sweating, trying to banish the images from his head, he tried to find a clear shot at Tarson. There wasn't one. Oh, he could hit Tarson, but not anywhere that would drop him immediately. And if Waxillium didn't hit just right, the man would shoot Marasi by reflex.

The head was the best way to drop a Pewterarm. Only, Waxillium couldn't *see* the head. Could he shoot the gun? Marasi's face was in the way. The knees? He might be able to hit a knee. No. A Pewterarm would ignore most hits—if the damage wasn't immediately lethal, he'd stay up, and he'd shoot.

It *had* to be the head.

Waxillium held his breath. *This is the most accurate gun I've ever fired,* he thought. *I can't sit here, frozen. I have to act.*

I have to do something.

Sweat dripped off his chin. He raised his hand with a quick motion in front of him, then pointed the Sterrion to the side, off center from Marasi or Tarson. Wax fired.

The bullet shot out of the bubble in an instant, then hit slower time. It deflected, as bullets always did when fired from within a speed bubble. He watched it go, judging its new trajectory. It moved forward sluggishly, spinning as it cut through the air.

Wax took careful aim, waited several excruciating moments. Then he readied his steel.

"Drop it on my mark," he whispered.

Wayne nodded.

"Go."

Wax fired and Pushed.

The speed bubble fell.

"—ee!" Miles called.

A small shower of sparks exploded in the air as Wax's second bullet, propelled with incredible speed by his Steelpush, clipped the other one in midair and deflected it to the side: behind Marasi, into Tarson's head.

The Pewterarm dropped immediately, gun slapping to the ground, eyes staring dully upward. Miles gaped. Marasi blinked, then turned about, raising her arms to her chest.

"Aw, biscuits," Wayne said. "Did you *have* to hit him in the head? That was my lucky hat he was wearin'."

Miles recovered his wits and raised his revolver toward Wax. Wax turned and fired first, hitting Miles's hand, dropping his gun to the ground. Wax shot it, knocking it backward into the other room.

"Stop *doing* that!" Miles screamed. "You bast—"

Wax shot him in the mouth, driving him backward a step, throwing out chips of tooth. Miles still wore only the tattered remnants of his trousers.

"Somebody shoulda done that ages ago," Wayne muttered.

"It won't last," Wax said, plugging Miles in the face again to try to keep him disoriented. "Time for you to be off, Wayne. Backup plan is still a go."

"You sure you got them all, mate?"

"Tarson was the last." *And I'd better not be wrong.…*

"Grab my hat if you get the chance," Wayne said, scrambling away as Wax shot Miles in the face again. This hit barely bothered him, and the half-naked man lurched forward. Toward Marasi. Miles was unarmed, but there was murder in his eyes.

Wax dashed forward, throwing the empty gun at Miles, then fishing out a handful of bullets. He Pushed them toward the former lawman. One sliced him in the arm, one cut through his gut and came out the other side, but none lodged in a way that Wax could push them to shove Miles back.

Wax hit Miles just before he reached Marasi. The two went down in a heap on the dirty ground, under the mists rolling across the floor.

Wax grabbed Miles by the shoulder and started punching. *Just … keep … him busy …*

Miles showed a flash of amusement through the annoyance. He took a few of the punches, Wax's fist growing sore in the process. Wax could punch until his knuckles broke and his hand was reduced to a bloody mess, and Miles would be no worse for the wear.

"I knew you'd go for the girl," Wax said, holding Miles's attention. "You talk grandly about justice, but in the end, you're just a petty criminal."

Miles snorted, then kicked Wax free. Pain flared in Wax's chest as he was thrown back into a muddy portion of the tunnel, cold water splashing around him, soaking his mistcoat.

Miles stood up, wiping some blood off his lip where it had split, then healed. "You know the *really* sad thing, Wax? I understand you. I've felt like you, I’ve thought like you. But there was always that distant, rumbling dissatisfaction within. Like a storm on the horizon.”

Wax got to his feet and rammed a fist into Miles’s kidney. It didn’t even get a grunt. Miles grabbed him by the arm, twisting it, causing his shoulder to flare with pain. Wax gasped, and Miles kicked the back of his knee, sending him to the ground again.

As Wax tried to roll over, Miles grabbed him by the front of his shirt and hauled him up, then laid into him with a fist to the face. Marasi gasped, though she had been told to stay back. She did her part.

The punch slammed Wax down to the ground, and he tasted blood. Rust and Ruin … he’d be lucky if his jaw wasn’t broken. He also felt like he’d ripped something in his shoulder.

His wounds suddenly seemed to crash down upon him. He didn’t know if it was the mists, some action of Harmony, or simple adrenaline that had helped him ignore them for a time. But he hadn’t been healed. His side screamed from where he’d been shot, and his leg and arm had been burned and scraped raw by the explosion. He’d been clipped by bullets in the thigh and the arm. And now, Miles’s beating.

It overwhelmed him, and he groaned, slumping down, struggling to merely remain conscious. Miles pulled him up again, and Wax managed to get in one thrashing swing that connected. And did nothing. It was very, very difficult to brawl with a man who didn’t flinch when you hit him.

Another punch sent Wax to the ground again, head ringing, eyes seeing stars and flashes of light.

Miles leaned down, speaking in his ear. “Thing is, Waxillium, I know you feel it too. A part of you knows that you’re being used, that nobody cares about the downtrodden. You’re just a puppet. People are murdered every day this city. At least one a day. Did you know that?”

“I…” *Keep him talking.* He rolled onto his back, aching, meeting Miles’s eyes.

“People murdered every day,” Miles repeated, “and what was it that brought you out of your ‘retirement’? When I shot an old, would-be aristocratic wolfhound in the head. Did you ever stop to think of all the other people being killed in the streets? The beggars, the whores, the orphans? Dead because of lack of food, or because they were in the wrong place, or because they tried something stupid.”

“You’re trying to invoke the Survivor’s mandate,” Wax whispered. “But it won’t work, Miles. This isn’t the Final Empire of legend. A rich man can’t kill a poor one just because he feels like it. We’ve gotten better than that.”

“Bah!” Miles said. “They pretend and lie to make a good show.”

“No,” Waxillium said. “They have good intentions, and make laws that prevent the worst of it—but those laws still fall short. It’s not the same thing.”

Miles kicked him in the side to keep him down. “I don’t care about the Survivor’s mandate. I’ve found something better. That doesn’t matter to you. You’re just a sword, a tool that goes where it’s pointed. It rips you apart that you can’t stop the things that you know you should. Doesn’t it?”

They met eyes. And, shockingly—despite the agony—Waxillium found himself nodding. Truthfully nodding. He did feel it. That was why what had happened to Miles terrified him.

“Well, someone has to do something about it,” Miles said.

Harmony, Waxillium thought. *If Miles had been born back then, in the days before, he’d have been a hero.* “I’ll start helping them, Miles,” Waxillium said. “I promise it to you.”

Miles shook his head. “You won’t live that long, Wax. Sorry.” He kicked again. And again. And again.

Waxillium curled around himself, hands over his face. He couldn’t fight. He just had to last. But the pain was mounting. It was *terrible*.

“Stop it!” Marasi’s voice. “Stop it, you monster!”

The kicks stopped falling. Waxillium felt her beside him, kneeling, hand on his shoulder.

Fool woman. Stay back. Unnoticed. That was the plan.

Miles cracked his knuckles audibly. “I suppose I should deliver you to Suit, girl. You’re on his list, and you can replace the one Waxillium set free. I’ll probably have to track her down.”

“Why is it,” Marasi said angrily, “that small-minded men must destroy that which they know is better, and greater, than they?”

“Better than me?” Miles said. “This? He isn’t great, child.”

“The greatest of men can be taken down by the simplest of things. A lowly bullet can end the life of the most powerful, most capable, most secure of men.”

“Not me,” Miles said. “Bullets are nothing to me.”

“No,” she replied. “You’ll be brought down by something even more lowly.”

“Which is?” he asked, amused, voice growing closer.

“Me,” Marasi replied.

Miles laughed. “I’d like to see…” He trailed off.

Waxillium cracked his eyes, looking down the length of the tunnel toward the broken ceiling where the building had stood. Light flooded that pit from above, growing brighter at a remarkable rate.

“Who have you brought?” Miles asked, sounding unimpressed. “They won’t arrive quickly enough.” He paused. Waxillium rolled his head to the side and saw the sudden horror in Miles’s face. He had seen it, finally: a shimmering border nearby, a slight difference in the air. Like the distortion caused by heat rising from a hot street.

A speed bubble.

Miles spun on Marasi. Then he ran for the bubble’s border, away from the light. Trying to escape.

The light at the other end of the tunnel became bright, and a group of blurs moved down it, so quickly it was impossible to distinguish what was causing them.

Marasi dropped her bubble. The sunlight of full day streamed in from the distant pit, and filling the tunnel—right outside where the bubble had been—was a force of over a hundred constables in uniform. Wayne stood at their head, grinning, wearing a constable’s uniform and hat, a false mustache on his face.

“Get ’im, boys!” he said, pointing.

They moved in with clubs, not bothering with guns. Miles screamed in denial, trying to dodge past the first few, then punching at the group that laid hands on him. He wasn’t fast enough, and there were far too many of them. In minutes, they had him held down against the ground and were wrapping ropes around his arms.

Waxillium sat up with care, one eye swelling closed, lip bleeding, side aching. Marasi knelt beside him, anxious.

“You shouldn’t have confronted him,” Waxillium said, tasting blood. “If he’d knocked you out, that would have been the end of it.”

“Oh, hush,” she said. “You aren’t the only one who can take risks.”

The backup plan had been straightforward, if difficult. It had begun with eliminating all of Miles’s lackeys. Even one of them, left alive, could have noticed what the speed bubble meant and shot Waxillium and Marasi from the outside. There wouldn't have been anything they could have done to prevent it.

But if the lackeys were gone, and if Miles could be distracted long enough while the bubble was up, Wayne could go to gather a large force to surround Miles while he was helpless. He'd never have let it happen if he'd suspected. But within the speed bubble …

"No!" Miles screamed. "Unhand me. I defy your oppression!"

"You are a fool," Waxillium said to him, then spat blood to the side. "You let yourself get isolated and distracted, Miles. You forgot the first rule of the Roughs."

Miles screamed, one of the constables pulling a gag over his mouth as he was tied tightly.

"The more alone you are," Waxillium said softly, "the more important it is to have someone you can rely upon."

20

“The constable-general has decided not to charge your associate for impersonating an officer of the law,” Reddi said.

Waxillium dabbed at his lip with the handkerchief. He sat in the precinct office nearest the Vanisher lair. He felt like slag, with broken ribs and half his body wrapped in bandages. He’d have scars from this.

“The constable-general,” Marasi said, voice hard, “should be *glad* for Lord Waxillium’s aid—in fact, he should have begged for Lord Waxillium’s help all along.” She sat beside him on the bench, hovering protectively.

“He actually *does* seem glad,” Reddi said. Now that Waxillium paid closer attention, he noticed how the constable kept glancing through the precinct room toward Brettin, the constable-general. Reddi’s eyes narrowed slightly, lips turning down. He was baffled by his superior’s calm reaction to events.

Waxillium was too exhausted at the moment to bother with the anomaly. In fact, it was nice to hear of something happening in his favor.

Reddi was called over by one of the other constables, and he left. Marasi laid a hand on Waxillium’s good arm. He could practically *feel* her concern for him physically in the way she hesitated, the way her brow wrinkled.

“You did well,” Waxillium said. “Miles was your catch, Lady Marasi.”

“I’m not the one who had to be beaten bloody.”

“Wounds heal,” Waxillium said, “even on an old horse like me. Watching him attack me and doing nothing … I’ll bet that was excruciating. I don’t think I could have stood it, if our places had been reversed.”

“You’d have done it. You’re like that. You’re every bit the man I thought you might be, yet somehow more *real* at the same time.” She looked at him, eyes wide, lips pursed. As if she wanted to say more. He could read her intent in those eyes.

“This isn’t going to work, Lady Marasi,” he said gently. “I’m thankful for your aid. Very thankful. But the thing you wish between us is not viable. I’m sorry.”

Not unexpectedly, she blushed. “Of course. I wasn’t implying such a thing.” She forced a laugh. “Why would you think—I mean, it’s silly!”

“I apologize, then,” he said. Though, of course, they both knew what the exchange had meant. He felt a deep regret. *If I were ten years younger …*

It wasn’t the age per se. It was what those years had done to him. When you watched a woman you loved die by your own gunshot, when you saw an old colleague and respected lawkeeper turn bad, it did things to you. Ripped you up inside. And *those* wounds, they didn’t heal nearly as easily as the bodily ones.

This woman was young, full of life. She didn’t deserve someone who was basically all scars wrapped up in a thick skin of sun-dried leather.

Eventually, Constable-General Brettin walked over to them. He was as stiff-backed as before, constable’s hat carried under his arm. “Lord Waxillium,” he said in a monotone.

“Constable-General.”

“For your efforts today, I have requested that the Senate give you a citywide deputized forbearance.”

Waxillium blinked in surprise.

“If you are not aware,” Brettin continued, “this would give you powers of investigation and arrest, as if you were a member of the constabulary, sufficient to authorize actions such as those of last night.”

“That is … very considerate of you,” Waxillium said.

“It is one of the only ways to excuse your actions without drawing embarrassment down upon the precinct. I have backdated the request, and if we are in luck, nobody will realize you were working alone this past night. Also, I do not wish for you to feel that you *need* to work alone. This city could use your expertise.”

“With all due respect, sir,” Waxillium said, “that’s quite a change from your previous stance.”

“I have had occasion to change my mind,” Brettin said. “You should know that I will soon be retiring. A new constable-general will be appointed in my position, but he will be required to accept the Senate’s mandate regarding you, should this motion be accepted.”

“I…” Waxillium was uncertain how to reply. “Thank you.”

"It's for the good of the City. Of course, note that if you abuse this privilege, it will undoubtedly be revoked." Brettin nodded awkwardly and withdrew.

Waxillium scratched at his chin, watching the man. Something decidedly odd was going on there. He was almost like a different person. Wayne passed him, tipping his lucky hat—which was bloodied on one side—and grinning as he approached Waxillium and Marasi.

"Here," Wayne said, covertly handing something wrapped in a handkerchief to Waxillium. It was unexpectedly heavy. "Got you another of those guns."

Waxillium sighed.

"Don't worry," Wayne said, "I traded a real nice scarf for it."

"And where did you get the scarf?"

"Off one of the dead blokes you shot," Wayne said. "So it wasn't stealin'. He ain't gonna need it, after all." He seemed quite proud of himself.

Waxillium tucked the gun into his empty holster. The other holster held Vindication. Marasi had searched through the hideout after Miles was taken and had recovered it for him. That was good. It would have been sad to survive this night, only to have Ranette kill him.

"So," Marasi said, "you traded a dead man's scarf for another dead man's gun. But … the gun itself belonged to someone dead, so by the same logic —"

"Don't try," Waxillium said. "Logic doesn't work on Wayne."

"I bought a ward against it off a traveling fortune-teller," Wayne explained. "It lets me add two 'n' two and get a pickle."

"I … have no response to that," Marasi said.

"Technically that *was* a response," Wayne said.

"Looks like they fished that gunsmith outta the canal for you, Wax, and he's alive. Not real happy, but alive."

"Has anyone found anything regarding the other women who were kidnapped?" Waxillium asked.

Wayne glanced at Marasi, who shook her head. "Nothing. Maybe Miles will know where they are."

If he'll talk, Waxillium thought. Miles had stopped feeling pain long ago. Waxillium wasn't certain how anyone would go about interrogating him.

Waxillium felt that by not rescuing the other women, he had failed in large measure. He'd vowed to get Steris back, and he had. But a greater evil had been done.

He sighed as the door to the captain's office opened, and Steris stepped out. A pair of senior constables had taken her statement, after taking that of Waxillium and Wayne. The two constables waved for Marasi next, and she went, glancing over her shoulder at Waxillium. He'd told her to be frank and straightforward with them, and to not hide anything he or Wayne had done. Though, if she could, she was to obscure Ranette's role.

Wayne wandered over to where some constables were eating morning sandwiches. They regarded him with suspicion, but—by experience—Waxillium knew that Wayne would soon have them laughing and asking him to join them. *Does he even understand what he does?* Waxillium wondered as Wayne launched into an explanation of the fight for the constables. *Or does he just do it all by instinct?*

Waxillium watched for a moment before realizing that Steris had approached him. She sat down in the chair directly across from him, maintaining good posture. She had fixed her hair, and while her dress was rumpled from her day of captivity, she looked relatively composed.

"Lord Waxillium," she said. "I find it necessary to offer you my thanks."

"I hope the necessity isn't too onerous," Waxillium said with a grunt.

"Only in that it comes … is required … after an onerous captivity. You should know that I was not touched indecently by my captors. I remain pure."

"Rust and *Ruin*, Steris! I'm glad, but I didn't need to know that."

"You did," she said, face impassive. "Assuming you still wish to proceed with our nuptials."

"It wouldn't matter either way. Besides, I thought we weren't to that point yet. We haven't even announced that we are seeing one another."

"Yes, though I believe we can now amend our previous timetable. You see, a dramatic rescue such as you have effected will be expected to create an outpouring of my emotions. What once might have been a scandal will instead be viewed as romantic. We could plausibly announce an engagement next week and have it be accepted in high society without concern or comment."

"That's good, I suppose."

"Yes. Shall I proceed with our contract, then?"

"You don't mind that I've returned to the miscreant ways of my past?"

“I rather think that I would soon be *dead* if you had not,” Steris said. “I am not in a position to complain.”

“I intend to continue,” Waxillium warned. “Not every day, patrolling a beat or anything like that. But I’ve received a forbearance—and an offer—to be involved in constabulary business in the city. I plan to take on the occasional problem that needs extra attention.”

“Every gentleman needs a hobby,” she said evenly. “And, considering the self-indulgences of some men I’ve known, this wouldn’t be problematic by comparison.” She leaned forward. “In short, my lord, I see you for what you are. The two of us, we are beyond the points in our lives where expecting the other to change would be realistic. I will accept this about you if you will accept me. I am not without my faults, as my previous three suitors chose to explain to me—at length—in written communication.”

“I hadn’t realized.”

“It is not an issue worthy of your attention, really,” she said. “Though I did think that you’d have realized I did not come to this potential union without—no offense—a measure of desperation.”

“I understand.”

Steris hesitated; then a bit of her coldness seemed to depart. Some of her control, her steely will, fell away. She looked tired, suddenly. Worn. Though behind that mask, he saw something that might have been affection for him. She clasped her hands before her. “I am not … good with people, Lord Waxillium. I realize it. I must stress, however, that you have my thanks for what you have done. I speak it from the depths of all that I am. Thank you.”

He met her eyes, and nodded.

“So,” she said, growing more businesslike. “We progress with our engagement?”

He hesitated. There was no reason not to, but a part of him found that he thought himself a coward. Of the two offers this day—one unspoken, the other blunt—*this* was the one he was contemplating?

He glanced toward the room where Marasi was giving the report of her involvement in this mess. She *was* entrancing. Beautiful, intelligent, motivated. By all logic and reason, he should have been completely infatuated with her.

In fact, she reminded him a lot of Lessie. Perhaps that was the problem.

“We move forward,” he said, turning back to Steris.

EPILOGUE

Marasi attended Miles's execution.

Daius, the senior prosecutor, had counseled against it. He never attended executions.

She sat on the outer balcony, alone, watching Miles walk up the steps to the firing platform. Her position was above the execution site.

She narrowed her eyes, remembering Miles standing in that underground room of darkness and mist, pointing a gun at her hiding place. She'd had a gun to her head three times during that two-day span, but the only time she'd really believed that she would die had been when she had seen the look in Miles's eyes. The heartless lack of emotion, the superiority.

She shivered. The time between the Vanisher attack at the wedding and Miles's capture had been less than a day and a half. Yet she felt like during that time she'd aged two decades. It was like a form of temporal Allomancy, a speed bubble around her alone. The world was different now. She'd nearly been killed, she'd killed for the first time, she'd fallen in love and been rejected. Now she'd helped condemn to death a former hero of the Roughs.

Miles looked with contempt on the constables who tied him to the restraining pole. He'd shown that same expression through most of the trial—the first one she'd helped prosecute as an attorney, though Daius had been the lead on the case. The trial had gone quickly, despite its high-profile and high-stakes nature. Miles had not denied his crimes.

It seemed that he saw himself as immortal. Even standing up there—his metalminds removed, a dozen rifles cocked and pointed toward him—he didn't seem to believe he would die. The human mind was very clever at tricking itself, at keeping the despair of inevitability at bay. She'd known that look in Miles’s eyes. Every man had it, when young. And every man eventually saw it as a lie.

The rifles went to shoulders. Perhaps now Miles would finally recognize that lie himself. As the guns fired, Marasi found that she was satisfied. And that disturbed her greatly.

* * *

Waxillium boarded the train at Dryport. His leg still ached, he walked with a cane, and he wore a bandage around his chest to help with the broken ribs. One week wasn’t nearly enough time to heal from what he’d been through. He probably shouldn’t have left his bed.

He limped down the corridor of the lavish first-class carriage, passing handsomely appointed private rooms. He counted off to the third compartment as the train labored into motion. He walked into the chamber, leaving the door open, and sat down in one of the well-stuffed chairs by the window. It was affixed to the floor, and sat before a small table with a long, single leg. It was curved and slender, like a woman’s neck.

A short time later, he heard footsteps in the corridor. They hesitated at the doorway.

Waxillium watched the scenery passing outside. “Hello, Uncle,” he said, turning to look at the man in the doorway.

Lord Edwarn Ladrian stepped into the room, walking with a whale-ivory cane and wearing fine clothing. “How did you find me?” he asked, sitting down in the other chair.

“A few of the Vanishers we interrogated,” Waxillium said. “They described a man that Miles called ‘Mister Suit.’ I don’t think anyone else recognized you in the description. From what I understand, you were hermitlike during the decade leading up to your ‘death.’ Save for your letters to the broadsheets about political matters, of course.”

That didn’t answer the question exactly. Waxillium had found this train, and this car, based on the numbers written in Miles’s cigar box, the one Wayne had found. Railway routes. Everyone else thought they had been trains the Vanishers had been planning to hit, but Waxillium had seen a different pattern. Miles had been tracking Mister Suit’s movements.

“Interesting,” Lord Edwarn said. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his fingers as a servant entered, bringing a tray of food and setting it on the table in front of him. Another poured him wine. He waved for them to wait outside the door.

“Where is Telsin?” Waxillium asked.

“Your sister is safe.”

Waxillium closed his eyes, and fought down the welling of emotion. He’d thought her dead in the wreck that supposedly claimed his uncle’s life, but had dealt with his emotions, such as they were. It had been years since he’d seen his sister.

Why, then, was finding out that she lived so powerfully meaningful to him? He couldn’t even define *which* emotions he was feeling.

He forced his eyes open. Lord Edwarn was watching him, holding a glass of crystalline white wine in his fingers. “You suspected,” Edwarn said. “All along, you suspected I wasn’t dead. That’s why you recognized whatever description those ruffians were able to give. I’ve changed clothing styles, my haircut, and even shaved my beard.”

“You shouldn’t have had your butler try to kill me,” Waxillium said. “He was too long in the family employ, and he was too ready to kill me, to have been hired by the Vanishers on such short notice. It meant he was working for someone else, and had been for some time. The simplest answer was that he was still working for the person he’d served for years.”

“Ah. Of course, you weren’t supposed know he caused the explosion.”

“I wasn’t supposed to survive it, you mean.”

Lord Ladrian shrugged.

“Why?” Waxillium asked, leaning in. “Why bring me back, if only to then have me killed? Why not arrange for someone else to take the house title?”

“Hinston was going to take it,” Lord Ladrian said, buttering a roll. “His disease was … unfortunate. Plans were already in motion. I didn’t have time to search out other options. Besides, I hoped—obviously, without basis—that you’d have overcome your overdeveloped childhood sense of morality. I had hoped you’d be a resource to me.”

Rust and Ruin, I hate this man, Waxillium thought, memories of his childhood returning to him. He’d gone to the Roughs, in part, to escape that condescending voice.

“I’ve come for the other four kidnapped women,” Waxillium said.

Lord Ladrian took a sip of wine. “You think I’m going to give them up, just like that?”

"Yes. I will expose you, otherwise."

"Go right ahead!" Lord Ladrian seemed amused. "Some will believe you. Others will think you mad. Neither reaction will hinder me or my colleagues."

"Because you've already been defeated," Waxillium said.

Lord Ladrian almost choked on his roll. He laughed, lowering it to the table. "Is that honestly what you think?"

"The Vanishers are gone," Waxillium said, "Miles is being executed as we speak, and I know that you were funding him. We captured the goods you were stealing, so you have gained nothing there. You obviously didn't have much in the way of funds to begin with. Otherwise you wouldn't have needed Miles and his team to do the robberies."

"I assure you, Waxillium, that we are *quite* solvent. Thank you. And you'll find no proof that I or my associates had anything to do with the robberies. We rented Miles his space, but how could we have known what he was up to? Harmony! He was a respected lawkeeper."

"You took the women."

"There is no proof of that. Just speculation on your part. A few of the Vanishers will swear to their graves that Miles raped and killed the women. I know for a fact that one of those Vanishers survived. Though I *am* still curious how you found me here, in this particular train."

Waxillium made no reply to that specifically. "I know that you're ruined," he said instead. "Say what you will, I see it. Give me the women and my sister. I'll recommend to the judges that you be shown leniency. Yes, you funded a group of robbers as a means of high-stakes investment. But you explicitly told them not to hurt anyone, and you weren't the one to pull the trigger and kill Peterus. I suspect you'll escape execution."

"You assume so many things, Waxillium," Lord Ladrian said. He reached into the pocket of his jacket and removed a folded broadsheet and a thin, black leather appointment book. He set them down on the table, broadsheet on the top. "Funding a group of robbers as a means of high-stakes investment? Is that *really* what you think this was about?"

"That and kidnapping the women," Waxillium said. "Presumably as a means of extorting their families."

That last part was a lie. Waxillium didn't believe for a moment that it was about extortion. His uncle was planning something, and considering the family lines of those women, Waxillium suspected that Marasi was right. It was about Allomancy.

He harbored a hope that his uncle wasn't involved in the direct … breeding. The very idea made Waxillium uncomfortable. Perhaps Ladrian was merely selling the women to someone else.

What a thing to hope for.

Ladrian tapped the broadsheet. The headline was about news that was going around the city. House Tekiel was on the brink of collapse. They'd had too much bad publicity in the robbery last week, even though the cargo had been recovered. That, mixed with other serious financial troubles …

Other serious financial troubles.

Waxillium scanned the broadsheet. Tekiel's main house business was security. Insurance. *Rust and Ruin!* he thought, making the connection.

"A series of targeted attacks," Ladrian said, leaning in, sounding pleased with himself. "House Tekiel is doomed. They owe payments on too many high-profile losses. These attacks, and the insurance claims, have devastated them and their financial integrity. Company shareholders have been selling their stakes for pennies. You claimed my finances were weak. That is only because they have been dedicated to a specific task. Have you wondered, yet, why your house is destitute?"

"You took it all," Waxillium guessed. "You funneled it out of the house finances into … something. Somewhere."

"We have just seized one of the most powerful financial institutions in the city," Ladrian said. "The materials stolen are being returned, and so while we've assumed Tekiel's debts by purchasing them, the claims for lost goods will soon be nullified. I *always* expected Miles to be captured. This plan wouldn't work without it."

Waxillium closed his eyes, feeling a dread. *I've been chasing chickens this entire time,* he realized. *While someone stole the horses.* It wasn't about robberies, or even kidnappings.

It was insurance fraud.

"We needed only the *temporary* disappearance of goods," Edwarn said. "And everything has worked out perfectly. Thank you."

* * *

The bullets ripped through Miles's body. Marasi watched, holding her breath, forcing herself not to wince. It was time to stop being a child.

He was shot again. Her eyes open, her nerves steeled, she was able to watch with horror as his wounds started to heal. It should have been impossible. They'd searched him carefully for metalminds. Yet the bullet holes pulled closed, and his smile widened, his eyes wild.

"You are fools!" Miles yelled at the firing squad. "One day, the men of gold and red, bearers of the final metal, *will* come to you. And you *will* be ruled by them."

They fired again. More bullets ripped into Miles. The wounds again closed, but not all the way. He didn't have enough healing stored in whatever last metalmind he had hidden. Marasi found herself shivering as a fourth volley struck his body, causing him to spasm.

"Worship," Miles said, his voice failing, his mouth spouting blood. "Worship Trell and wait…"

The fifth volley of bullets hit, and this time none of the wounds healed. Miles slackened in his bonds, eyes open and lifeless, staring at the ground before him.

The constables looked extremely disturbed. One of them ran up to check for a pulse. Marasi shivered. Right up until the end, Miles hadn't seemed like he accepted death.

But he *was* dead now. A Bloodmaker like him could heal repeatedly, but if they ever actually stopped healing—let their wounds consume them—they would die like anyone else. Just to make certain, the nearest constable raised a handgun and blasted Miles three times in the side of the head. This was gruesome enough that Marasi had to look away.

It was done. Miles Hundredlives was dead.

In turning away, however, she saw a figure watching from the shadows below, ignored by the constables. He turned away, black robe rippling, and walked out through a gate leading into the alley.

* * *

"It's not only about the insurance," Waxillium said, meeting Edwarn's eyes. "You took the women."

Edwarn Ladrian said nothing.

“I’m going to stop you, Uncle,” Waxillium said softly. “I don’t know what you’re doing with those women, but I *am* going to find a way to stop it.”

“Oh please, Waxillium,” Edwarn said. “Your self-righteousness was tiring enough when you were a youth. Your heritage alone should make you better than that.”

“My heritage?”

“You are of a noble bloodline,” Ladrian said. “Directly back to the Counselor of Gods himself. You are Twinborn, and a powerful Allomancer. It was with great regret that I ordered your death, and I only did so under pressure from my colleagues. I suspected, even hoped, you would survive. This world needs you. Us.”

“You sound like Miles,” Waxillium said, surprised.

“No,” Ladrian said. “He sounded like *me*.” He tucked his handkerchief into his collar, then began to dine. “But you are not ready. I will see that you are sent the proper information. For now, you may withdraw and consider what I’ve told you.”

“I don’t think so,” Waxillium said, reaching into his jacket for a handgun.

Ladrian looked up with a pitying expression. Waxillium heard guns being cocked, and glanced to the side, to where several young men wearing black suits stood in the corridor outside. None were wearing metal on their bodies.

“I have nearly twenty Allomancers riding in this train, Waxillium,” Edwarn said, voice cold. “And you are wounded, barely able to walk. You don’t have a sliver of evidence against me. Are you certain this is a fight you want to start?”

Waxillium hesitated. Then he growled and reached forward with an empty hand to sweep the meal off his uncle’s table. Dishes and food spilled to the floor with a crash as Waxillium bent forward, enraged. “I’ll kill you someday, Uncle.”

Edwarn leaned back, unthreatened. “Lead him to the back of the train. Throw him off. Good day, Waxillium.”

Waxillium tried to reach for his uncle, but the men rushed in and grabbed him, pulling him away. His side and his leg both flared in pain at the treatment. Edwarn was right about one thing. This wasn’t the day to fight.

But that day *would* come.

Waxillium let them tow him down the hallway. They opened the door at the end of the train and tossed him out toward the tracks that sped by beneath. He caught himself with Allomancy, as they'd no doubt expected he would, and landed to watch the train speed away.

* * *

Marasi burst out into the alleyway beside the precinct building. She felt something stirring in her, a powerful curiosity she could not describe. She *had* to find out who that figure was.

She caught a glimpse of the hem of a dark robe disappearing around a corner. She ran after it, holding her handbag in a tight grip and reaching inside for the small revolver Waxillium had given her.

What am I doing? a part of her mind thought. *Running into an alleyway alone?* It wasn't a particularly sensible thing to do. She just *felt* that she had to do it.

She ran a short distance. Had she lost the figure? She paused at an intersection, where an even smaller alleyway cut off from the first. Her curiosity was almost unbearable.

Standing in the mouth of the smaller alleyway, waiting for her, was a tall man in a black robe.

She gasped, stepping backward. The man was well over six feet tall, and the enveloping robe gave him an ominous appearance. He brought up pale hands and took down his hood, exposing a shaved head and a face that was tattooed around the eyes in an intricate pattern.

Driven into those eyes, point-first, were what looked like a pair of thick railroad spikes. One of the eye sockets was deformed, as if it had been crushed, long-healed scars and bony ridges under the skin marring the tattoos.

Marasi knew this creature from mythology, but seeing him left her cold, terrified. "Ironeyes," she whispered.

"I apologize for bringing you like this," Ironeyes said. He had a quiet, gravelly voice.

"Like this?" she said, her voice coming out as almost a squeak.

"With emotional Allomancy. I sometimes Pull too hard. I've never been as good at this sort of thing as Breeze was. Be calm, child. I will not hurt you."

She felt an instant calmness, though that felt terribly unnatural, and left her feeling even worse. Calm, but sick. One should not be calm when speaking with Death himself.

“Your friend,” Ironeyes said, “has uncovered something very dangerous.”

“And you wish him to stop?”

“Stop?” Ironeyes said. “Not at all. I wish him to be informed. Harmony has particular views about how things must be done. I do not always agree with him. Oddly, his particular beliefs require that he allow that. Here.” Ironeyes reached into the folds of his cloak, bringing out a small book. “There is information in this. Guard it carefully. You may read it, if you wish, but deliver it to Lord Waxillium on my behalf.”

She took the book. “Pardon,” she said, trying to fight through the numbness he had put inside her. Was she really speaking to a mythological figure? Was she going mad? She could barely think. “But why didn’t you take it to him yourself?”

Ironeyes responded with a tight-lipped smile, watching her with the heads of those silvery spikes. “I have a feeling he’d have tried to shoot me. That one does not like unanswered questions, but he does my brother’s work, and that is something I feel inclined to encourage. Good day, Lady Marasi Colms.”

Ironeyes turned, cloak rustling, and walked away down the alley. He put his hood up as he walked, then lifted into the air, propelled by Allomancy over the tops of the nearby buildings. He vanished from sight.

Marasi clutched the book, then slid it into her handbag, shaking.

* * *

Waxillium landed at the rail station, dropping as gently as he could from his Allomantic flight down the tracks. Landing still hurt his leg.

Wayne sat on the platform, feet up on a barrel, smoking his pipe. He still had his arm in a sling. He wouldn’t be able to heal it quickly—he had no health stored up. Trying to store some now would just make him heal more slowly during that process, then heal more quickly as he tapped his metalmind, ending with no net gain.

Wayne was reading a small novel that he’d picked out of someone’s pocket on their train ride out to the estates. He’d left an aluminum bullet in its place, worth easily a hundred times the price of the book. Ironically, the person who found it would probably throw it away, never realizing its value.

I'll need to talk to him about that again, Waxillium thought, walking up onto the platform. *But not today.* Today, they had other worries.

Waxillium joined his friend, but continued staring to the south. Toward the city, and his uncle.

"It's a pretty good book," Wayne said, flipping a page. "You should try it. It's about bunnies. They talk. Damnedest thing ever."

Waxillium didn't reply.

"So, was it your uncle?" Wayne asked.

"Yes."

"Crud. I owe you a fiver, then."

"The bet was for twenty."

"Yeah, but you owe me fifteen."

"I do?"

"Sure, for that bet I made that you'd end up helpin' me with the Vanishers."

Waxillium frowned, looking at his friend. "I don't remember that bet."

"You weren't there when we made it."

"I wasn't there?"

"Yeah."

"Wayne, you can't make bets with people when they aren't there."

"I can," Wayne said, tucking the book into his pocket and standing, "if they *shoulda* been there. And you shoulda, Wax."

"I…" How to respond to that? "I will be. From now on."

Wayne nodded, joining him and looking toward Elendel. It rose in the distance, the two competing skyscrapers rising on one side of the city, other smaller ones growing like crystals from the center of the expanding metropolis.

"You know," Wayne said, "I always wondered what it would be like to come here, find civilization and all that. I didn't realize."

"Realize what?" Waxillium asked.

"That *this* was really the rough part of the world," Wayne said. "That we had it easy, out past the mountains."

Waxillium found himself nodding. "You can be very wise sometimes, Wayne."

“It’s onnacount of my thinkin’, mate,” Wayne said, tapping his head, increasing the thickness of his accent. “It’s what I do wif my brain. Somma the time, at least.”

“And the rest of the time?”

“The rest of the time, I don’t do so much thinkin’. ’Cuz if I did, I’d go runnin’ back to where things is simple. You see?”

“I see. And we do have to stay, Wayne. I have work to do here.”

“Then we’ll see it done,” Wayne said. “Just like always.”

Waxillium nodded, reaching into his sleeve and sliding out a thin black book.

“What’s that?” Wayne asked, taking it, curious.

“My uncle’s pocket book,” Waxillium said. “Filled with appointments and notes.”

Wayne whistled softly. “How’d you take it? Shoulder bump?”

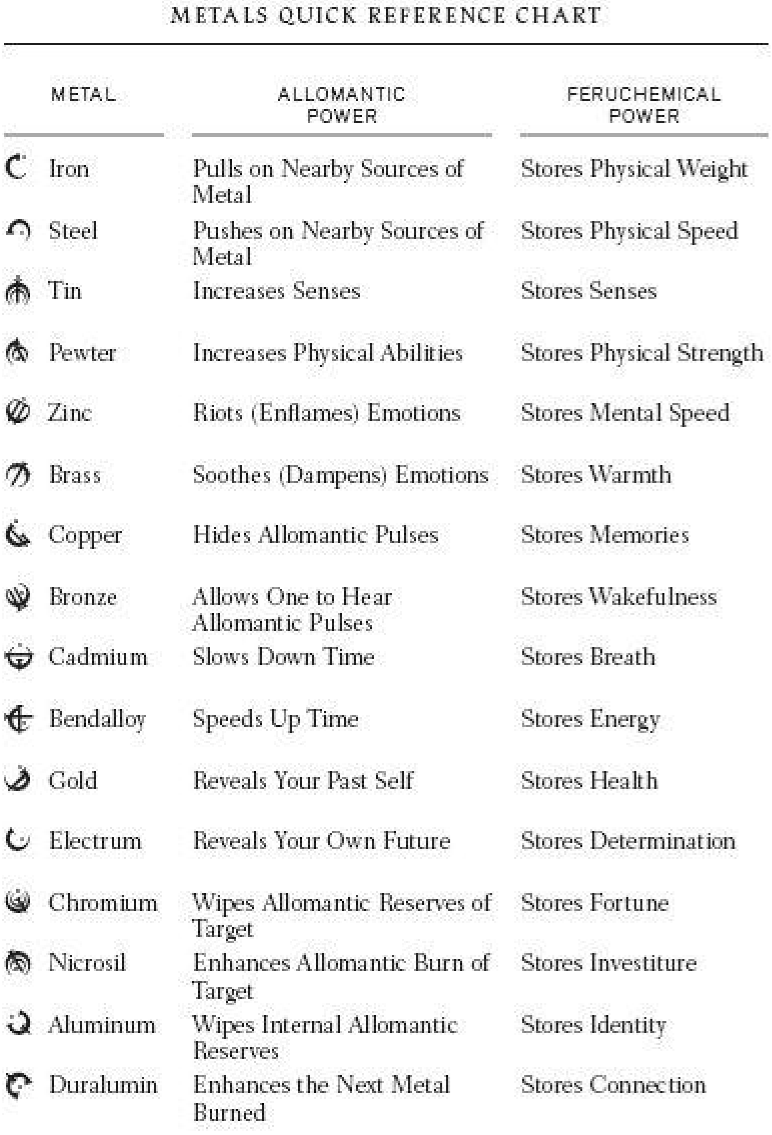
“Table sweep,” Waxillium said.

“Nice. Glad to know I’ve taught you *somethin’* useful during our years together. What did you trade for it?”

“A threat,” Waxillium said, looking back toward Elendel. “And a promise.”

He would see this to the end. Roughs honor. When one of your own went bad, it was your job to see the mess cleaned up.

ARS ARCANUM



METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER
Iron	Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Weight
Steel	Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Speed
Tin	Increases Senses	Stores Senses
Pewter	Increases Physical Abilities	Stores Physical Strength
Zinc	Riots (Enflames) Emotions	Stores Mental Speed
Brass	Soothes (Dampens) Emotions	Stores Warmth
Copper	Hides Allomantic Pulses	Stores Memories
Bronze	Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses	Stores Wakefulness
Cadmium	Slows Down Time	Stores Breath
Bendalloy	Speeds Up Time	Stores Energy
Gold	Reveals Your Past Self	Stores Health
Electrum	Reveals Your Own Future	Stores Determination
Chromium	Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target	Stores Fortune
Nicrosil	Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target	Stores Investiture
Aluminum	Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves	Stores Identity
Duralumin	Enhances the Next Metal Burned	Stores Connection

LIST OF METALS

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them, it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn brass to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (also known as Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields nearby individuals from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals’ power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people’s awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body’s usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher’s center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals’ power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I’m certain the people of Terris don’t truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (also known as Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies’ ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot’s center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses in a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the “Metallic Arts,” though there are other names for them.

Allomancy is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology, meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn’t actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn’t much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the God Metals locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

Feruchemy is still widely known and used at this point in Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren’t spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the inbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

Hemalurgy is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world’s rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an “evil” art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great interest to the Cosmere, it is this one. I think there are great possibilities for its use.

TOR BOOKS BY BRANDON SANDERSON

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The Way of Kings

Warbreaker

THE MISTBORN TRILOGY
Mistborn
The Well of Ascension
The Hero of Ages

Elantris

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THE ALLOY OF LAW: A MISTBORN NOVEL

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BRANDON SANDERSON

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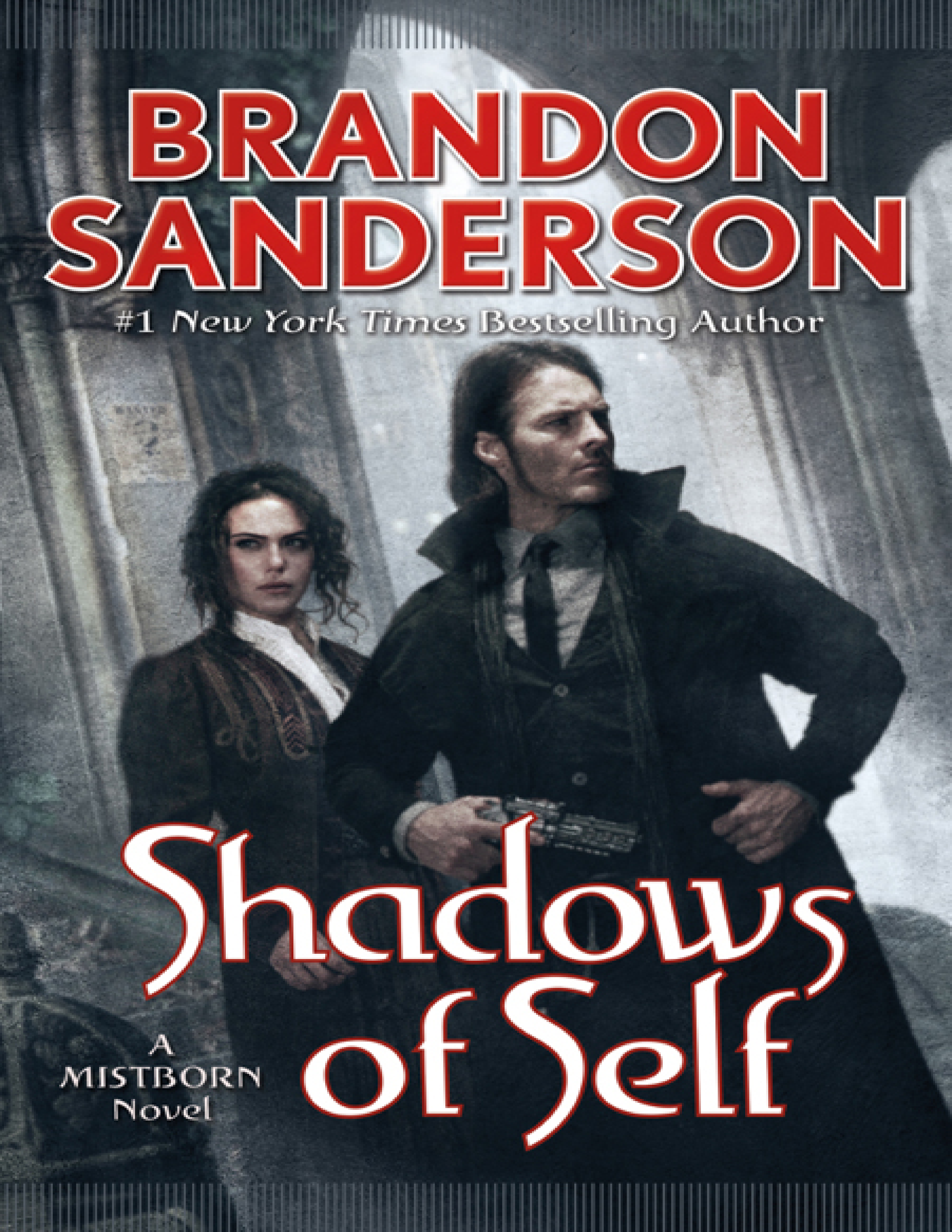

BRANDON
SANDERSON

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

Shadows of Self

A
MISTBORN
Novel

Begin Reading

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FOR MOSHE FEDER
Who took a chance on me

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has a somewhat storied past, as I wrote a third of it during the process of writing another book. (I was waiting for editorial notes to come back; I believe it was the final Wheel of Time book.) I had to drop work on this and dive into the other book.

By the time I came back, my vision for a new trilogy about Wax, Wayne, and Marasi had transformed—so the first third took some serious work to whip into shape and make match the last two thirds, as I wrote them. I relied a lot on the excellent editorial vision of my editor, Moshe Feder, my agent, Joshua Bilmes, and my editorial assistant, the Instant Peter Ahlstrom. Special thanks as well to my editor in the UK, Simon Spanton.

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Over the years, it’s been incredibly satisfying to see the artwork for my novels develop. I’ve always had this wild vision for including way more art than usual—basically all I can get away with. Three wonderful artists made this possible on this volume. Chris McGrath did the cover, and I *love* his depictions of the characters. My good friend and now full-time art director Īsaac Stewart did the maps and symbols, as well as the heavy design lifting

on the broadsheet. Art on the broadsheet was done by the ever-excellent Ben McSweeney.

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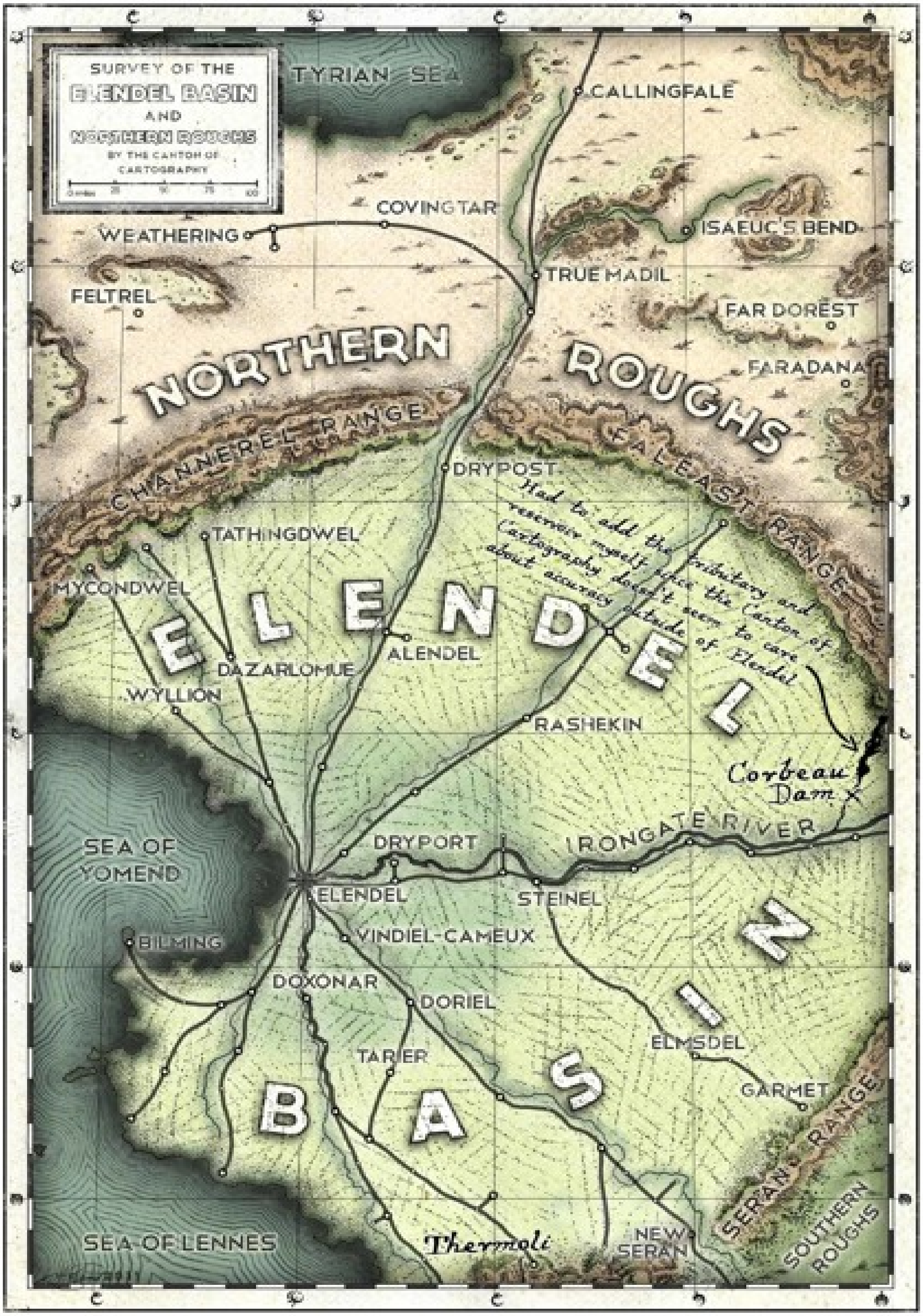
Finally, big thanks to my family, as always. A wonderful wife and three little boys who still get confused as to why the books Daddy writes have so few pictures.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FARADANA
CHANNEREL RANGE
SALEAST RANGE
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MYCONDWEL
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WYLLION
RASHEKIN
Corbeau Dam
SEA OF YOMEND
DRYPORT
IRONGATE RIVER
ELENDEL
STEINEL
BILMING
VINDIEL-CAMEUX
DOXONAR
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Thermoli
NEW SERAN
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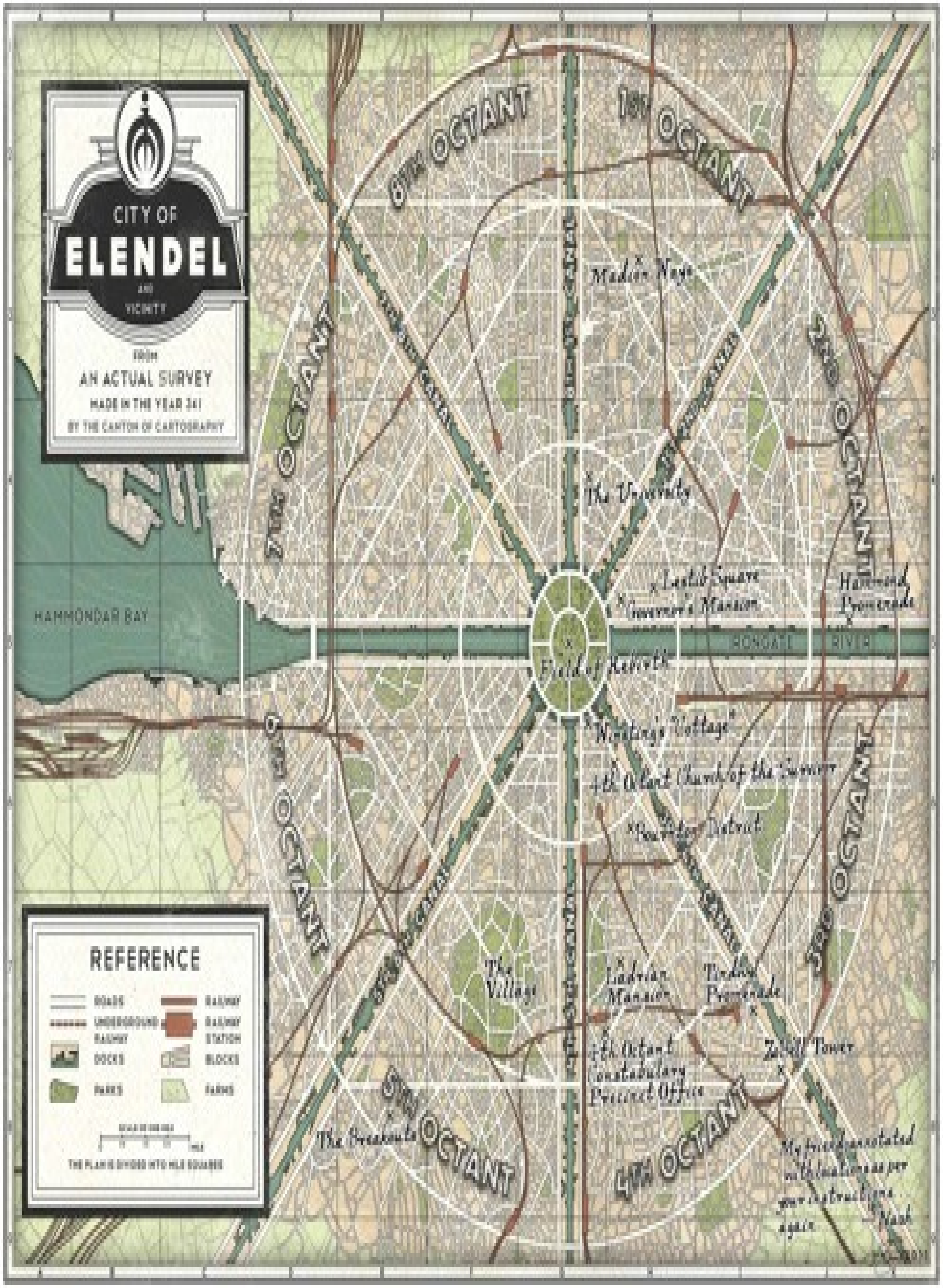
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Madion Naye
The University
Lestib Square
Governor's Mansion
Hammond Promenade
Field of Rebirth
"Winsting's "Cottage"
4th Octant Church of the Survivor
"Souther" District
The Village
Ladrian Mansion
Tindwyl Promenade
Zobell Tower
5th Octant Constabulary Precinct Office
The Breakouts
REFERENCE
ROADS
RAILWAY
UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
RAILWAY STATION
DOCKS
BLOCKS
PARKS
FARMS
MILE
THE PLAN IS DIVIDED INTO MILE SQUARES

My friend annotated with locations as per your instructions once again. —Nash

PROLOGUE

Waxillium Ladrian, lawman for hire, swung off his horse and turned to face the saloon.

“Aw,” the kid said, hopping down from his own horse. “You didn’t catch your spur on the stirrup and trip.”

“That happened *once*,” Waxillium said.

“Yeah, but it was *super* funny.”

“Stay with the horses,” Waxillium said, tossing the kid his reins. “Don’t tie up Destroyer. I might need her.”

“Sure.”

“And *don’t* steal anything.”

The kid—round-faced and seventeen, with barely a hint of stubble on his face despite weeks of trying—nodded with a solemn expression. “I promise I won’t swipe nothin’ of yours, Wax.”

Waxillium sighed. “That’s not what I said.”

“But…”

“Just stay with the horses. And try not to talk to anyone.” Waxillium shook his head, pushing into the saloon, feeling a spring in his step. He was filling his metalmind a smidge, decreasing his weight by about ten percent. Common practice for him these days, ever since he’d run out of stored weight during one of his first bounty hunts a few months back.

The saloon, of course, was dirty. Practically everything out here in the Roughs was dusty, worn, or broken. Five years out here, and he still wasn’t used to that. True, he’d spent most of those five years trying to make a living as a clerk, moving farther and farther from population centers in an effort to avoid getting recognized. But in the Roughs, even the larger population centers were dirtier than those back in Elendel.

And here, on the fringes of populated lands, dirty didn’t even *begin* to describe life. The men he passed in the saloon sat slumped low to their tables, hardly looking up. That was another thing about the Roughs. Both plants and people were more prickly, and they grew lower to the ground. Even the fanlike acacias, which did stretch high at times, had this fortified, hardy sense about them.

He scanned the room, hands on hips, hoping he’d draw attention. He didn’t, which nagged at him. Why wear a fine city suit, with a lavender cravat, if nobody was going to notice? At least they weren’t snickering, like those in the last saloon.

Hand on his gun, Waxillium sauntered up to the bar. The barkeep was a tall man who looked to have some Terris blood in him, from that willowy build, though his refined cousins in the Basin would be horrified to see him chewing on a greasy chicken leg with one hand while serving a mug with the other. Waxillium tried not to be nauseated; the local notion of hygiene was another thing he wasn’t yet accustomed to. Out here, the fastidious ones were those who remembered to wipe their hands on their trousers between picking their nose and shaking your hand.

Waxillium waited. Then waited some more. Then cleared his throat. Finally, the barkeep lumbered over to him.

“Yeah?”

“I’m looking for a man,” Waxillium said under his breath. “Goes by the name of Granite Joe.”

“Don’t know him,” the barkeep said.

“Don’t— He’s only the *single* most notorious outlaw in these parts.”

“Don’t know him.”

“But—”

“It’s safer to not know men like Joe,” the barkeep said, then took a bite of his chicken leg. “But I have a friend.”

“That’s surprising.”

The barkeep glared at him.

“Ahem,” Waxillium said. “Sorry. Continue.”

“My friend might be willing to know people that others won’t. It will take a little time to get him. You’ll pay?”

“I’m a lawman,” Waxillium said. “I do what I do in the name of justice.”

The barkeep blinked. Slowly, deliberately, as if it required conscious effort. “So … you’ll pay?”

“Yes, I’ll pay,” Waxillium said with a sigh, mentally counting what he’d already spent hunting Granite Joe. He couldn’t afford to go in the hole again. Destroyer needed a new saddle, and Waxillium went through suits frightfully quick out here.

“Good,” the barkeep said, gesturing for Waxillium to follow. They wove through the room, around tables and past the pianoforte, which sat beside one of the pillars, between two tables. It didn’t look like it had been played in ages, and someone had set a row of dirty mugs on it. Next to the stairs, they entered a small room. It smelled dusty.

“Wait,” the barkeep said, then shut the door and left.

Waxillium folded his arms, eyeing the room’s lone chair. The white paint was flaking and peeling; he didn’t doubt that if he sat down, he’d end up with half of it stuck to his trousers.

He was growing more comfortable with the people of the Roughs, if not their particular habits. These few months chasing bounties had shown him that there *were* good men and women out here, mixed among the rest. Yet they all had this stubborn *fatalism* about them. They didn’t trust authority, and often shunned lawmen, even if it meant letting a man like Granite Joe continue to ravage and plunder. Without the bounties set by the railroad and mining companies, nothing would ever—

The window shook. Waxillium stopped, then grabbed the gun at his side and burned steel. The metal created a sharp warmth within him, like the feeling after drinking something too hot. Blue lines sprang up pointing from his chest toward nearby sources of metal, several of which were just outside the shuttered window. Others pointed downward. This saloon had a basement, which was unusual out in the Roughs.

He could Push on those lines if he needed to, shoving on the metal they connected to. For now, he just watched as a small rod slipped between the window casements, then lifted, raising the latch that held them closed. The window rattled, then swung open.

A young woman in dark trousers hopped in, rifle in one hand. Lean, with a squarish face, she carried an unlit cigar in her teeth and looked vaguely familiar to Waxillium. She stood up, apparently satisfied, then turned to close the window. As she did, she saw him for the first time.

"Hell!" she said, scrambling backward, dropping her cigar, raising her rifle.

Waxillium raised his own gun and prepared his Allomancy, wishing he'd found a way to protect himself from bullets. He could Push on metal, yes, but he wasn't fast enough to stop gunfire, unless he Pushed on the gun before the trigger was pulled.

"Hey," the woman said, looking through the rifle sights. "Aren't you that guy? The one who killed Peret the Black?"

"Waxillium Ladrian," he said. "Lawman for hire."

"You're kidding. That's how you introduce yourself?"

"Sure. Why not?"

She didn't answer, instead looking away from her rifle, studying him for a few moments. Finally she said, "A cravat? Really?"

"It's kind of my thing," Waxillium said. "The gentleman bounty hunter."

"Why would a bounty hunter need a 'thing' in the first place?"

"It's important to have a reputation," Waxillium said, raising his chin. "The outlaws all have them; people have heard of men like Granite Joe from one side of the Roughs to the other. Why shouldn't I do the same?"

"Because it paints a target on your head."

"Worth the danger," Waxillium said. "But speaking of targets…" He waved his gun, then nodded toward hers.

"You're after the bounty on Joe," she said.

"Sure am. You too?"

She nodded.

"Split it?" Waxillium said.

She sighed, but lowered her rifle. "Fine. The one who shoots him gets a double portion though."

"I was planning to bring him in alive.…"

“Good. Gives me a better chance of killing him first.” She grinned at him, slipping over to the door. “The name’s Lessie. Granite *is* in here somewhere, then? Have you seen him?”

“No, I haven’t,” Waxillium said, joining her at the door. “I asked the barkeep, and he sent me in here.”

She turned on him. “You asked the barkeep.”

“Sure,” Waxillium said. “I’ve read the stories. Barkeeps know everything, and … You’re shaking your head.”

“*Everyone* in this saloon belongs to Joe, Mister Cravat,” Lessie said. “Hell, half the people in this town belong to him. You *asked the barkeep*?”

“I believe we’ve established that.”

“Rust!” She cracked the door and looked out. “How in Ruin’s name did *you* take down Peret the Black?”

“Surely it’s not that bad. *Everyone* in the bar can’t…”

He trailed off as he peeked out the door. The tall barkeep hadn’t run off to fetch anyone. No, he was out in the taproom of the saloon, gesturing toward the side room’s door and urging the assembled thugs and miscreants to stand up and arm themselves. They looked hesitant, and some were gesturing angrily, but more than a few had guns out.

“Damn,” Lessie whispered.

“Back out the way you came in?” Waxillium asked.

Her response was to slip the door closed with the utmost care, then shove him aside and scramble toward the window. She grabbed the windowsill to step out, but gunfire cracked nearby and wood chips exploded off the sill.

Lessie cursed and dropped to the floor. Waxillium dove down beside her.

“Sharpshooter!” he hissed.

“Are you always this observant, Mister Cravat?”

“No, only when I’m being shot at.” He peeked up over the lip of the windowsill, but there were a dozen places nearby where the shooter could be hiding. “This is a problem.”

“There’s that razor-sharp power of observation again.” Lessie crawled across the floor toward the door.

“I meant in more ways than one,” Waxillium said, crossing the floor in a crouch. “How did they have time to get a sharpshooter into position? They must have *known* that I was going to show up today. This whole place could be a trap.”

Lessie cursed softly as he reached the door and cracked it open again. The thugs were arguing quietly and gesturing toward the door.

"They're taking me seriously," Waxillium said. "Ha! The reputation is working. You see that? They're frightened!"

"Congratulations," she said. "Do you think they'll give me a reward if I shoot you?"

"We need to get upstairs," Waxillium said, eyeing a stairwell just outside their door.

"What good will that do?"

"Well, for one thing, all the armed people who want to kill us are down here. I'd rather be somewhere else, and those stairs will be easier to defend than this room. Besides, we might find a window on the other side of the building and escape."

"Yeah, if you want to jump two stories."

Jumping wasn't a problem for a Coinshot; Waxillium could Push off a dropped piece of metal as they fell, slowing himself and landing safely. He was also a Feruchemist, and could use his metalminds to reduce his weight far more than he was doing now, shaving it down until he practically floated.

However, Waxillium's abilities weren't widely known, and he wanted to keep it that way. He'd heard the stories of his miraculous survivals, and liked the air of mystery around them. There was speculation that he was Metalborn, sure, but so long as people didn't know exactly what he could do, he'd have an edge.

"Look, I'm going to run for the steps," he said to the woman. "If you want to stay down here and fight your way out, great. You'll provide an ideal distraction for me."

She glanced at him, then grinned. "Fine. We'll do it your way. But if we get shot, you owe me a drink."

There is *something familiar about her,* Waxillium thought. He nodded, counted softly to three, then burst out of the door and leveled his gun at the nearest thug. The man jumped back as Waxillium shot three times—and missed. His bullets hit the pianoforte instead, sounding a discordant note with each impact.

Lessie scrambled out behind him and went for the stairs. The motley collection of thugs leveled weapons with cries of surprise. Waxillium swung his gun back—out of the way of his Allomancy—and shoved lightly on the blue lines pointing from him toward the men in the room. They opened fire, but his Push had nudged their guns enough to spoil their aim.

Waxillium followed Lessie up the steps, fleeing the storm of gunfire.

“Holy hell,” Lessie said as they reached the first landing. “We’re alive.” She looked back at him, cheeks flushed.

Something clicked like a lock in Waxillium’s mind. “I *have* met you before,” he said.

“No you haven’t,” she said, looking away. “Let’s keep—”

“The Weeping Bull!” Waxillium said. “The dancing girl!”

“Oh, God Beyond,” she said, leading the way up the stairs. “You remember.”

“I *knew* you were faking. Even Rusko wouldn’t hire someone that uncoordinated, no matter how pretty her legs are.”

“Can we go jump out a window now, please?” she said, checking the top floor for signs of thugs.

“Why were you there? Chasing a bounty?”

“Yeah, kind of.”

“And you really didn’t know they were going to make you—”

“This conversation is done.”

They stepped out onto the top floor, and Waxillium waited a moment until a shadow on the wall announced someone following them upstairs. He fired once at the thug who appeared there, missing again, but driving the man back. He heard cursing and arguing below. Granite Joe might own the men in this saloon, but they weren’t overly loyal. The first few up the steps would almost certainly get shot, and none would be eager to take the risk.

That would buy Waxillium some time. Lessie pushed into a room, passing an empty bed with a pair of boots beside it. She threw open the window, which was on the opposite side of the building from the sharpshooter.

The town of Weathering spread before them, a lonely collection of shops and homes, hunkered down as if waiting—in vain—for the day when the railroad would stretch its fingers this far. In the middle distance, beyond the humble buildings, a few giraffes browsed lazily, the only sign of animal life in the vast plain.

The drop out the window was straight down, no roof to climb onto. Lessie regarded the ground warily. Waxillium shoved his fingers in his mouth and whistled sharply.

Nothing happened.

He whistled again.

“What the hell are you doing?” Lessie demanded.

“Calling my horse,” Waxillium said, then whistled again. “We can hop down into the saddle and ride away.”

She stared at him. “You’re serious.”

“Sure I am. We’ve been practicing.”

A lone figure walked out onto the street below, the kid who had been following Waxillium. “Uh, Wax?” the kid called up. “Destroyer’s just standing there, drinking.”

“Hell,” Waxillium said.

Lessie looked at him. “You named your horse—”

“She’s a little too placid, all right?” Waxillium snapped, climbing up onto the windowsill. “I thought the name might inspire her.” He cupped his hand, calling to the boy below. “Wayne! Bring her out here. We’re going to jump!”

“Like hell we are,” Lessie said. “You think there’s something magical about a saddle that will keep us from breaking the horse’s back when we drop into it?”

Waxillium hesitated. “Well, I’ve read about people doing this.…”

“Yeah, I’ve got an idea,” Lessie said. “Next, why don’t you call out Granite Joe, and go stand out in the road and have a good old-fashioned showdown at noon.”

“You think that would work? I—”

“No, it won’t work,” she snapped. “Nobody does that. It’s stupid. Ruin! How *did* you kill Peret the Black?”

They stared at each other a moment.

“Well…” Waxillium started.

“Oh hell. You caught him on the crapper, didn’t you?”

Waxillium grinned at her. “Yeah.”

“Did you shoot him in the back too?”

“As bravely as any man ever shot another in the back.”

“Huh. There might be hope for you yet.”

He nodded toward the window. “Jump?”

“Sure. Why not break both my legs before getting shot? Might as well go all in, Mister Cravat.”

“I think we’ll be fine, Miss Pink Garter.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“If you’re going to identify me by my clothing choices,” he said, “then I figure I can do the same.”

“It shall never be mentioned again,” she said, then took a deep breath. “So?”

He nodded, flaring his metals, preparing to hold on to her and slow them as they fell—just enough to make it seem like they’d miraculously survived the jump. As he did, however, he noticed one of his blue lines moving—a faint but thick one, pointing across the street.

The window in the mill. Sunlight glinted off something inside.

Waxillium immediately grabbed Lessie and pulled her down. A fraction of a second later, a bullet streaked over their heads and hit the door on the other side of the room.

“Another sharpshooter,” she hissed.

“Your power of observation is—”

“Shut it,” she said. “Now what?”

Waxillium frowned, considering the question. He glanced at the bullet hole, gauging the trajectory. The sharpshooter had aimed too high; even if Waxillium hadn’t ducked, he’d likely have been all right.

Why aim high? The moving blue line to the gun had indicated the sharpshooter running to get into position before shooting. Was it just rushed targeting? Or was there a more sinister reason? *To knock me out of the sky? When I flew out the window?*

He heard footsteps on the stairs, but saw no blue lines. He cursed, scrambling over and peeking out. A group of men were creeping up the steps, and not the normal thugs from below. These men wore tight white shirts, had pencil mustaches, and were armed with crossbows. Not a speck of metal on them.

Rusts! They knew he was a Coinshot, and Granite Joe had a kill squad ready for him.

He ducked back into the room and grabbed Lessie by the arm. “Your informant said Granite Joe was in this building?”

“Yeah,” she said. “He most certainly is. He likes to be close when a gang is being gathered; he likes to keep an eye on his men.”

“This building has a basement.”

“… So?”

“So hang on.”

He grabbed her in both hands and rolled onto the ground, causing her to yelp, then curse. Holding her over him, he increased his weight.

He had a great deal of it stored in his metalmind by now, after weeks of siphoning it off. Now he drew it all out, magnifying his weight manyfold in an instant. The wooden floor cracked, then *burst* open beneath them.

Waxillium fell through, his fine clothing getting ripped, and dropped through the air, towing Lessie after him. Eyes squeezed closed, he Pushed the hundreds of blue lines behind him, those leading to the nails in the floor below. He blasted them downward to shatter the ground level's floor and open the way into the basement.

They crashed through the ground floor in a shower of dust and splinters. Waxillium managed to slow their descent with a Steelpush, but they still came down hard, smashing into a table in a basement chamber.

Waxillium let out a puffing groan, but forced himself to twist around, shaking free of the broken wood. The basement, surprisingly, was paneled in fine hardwoods and lit by lamps shaped like curvaceous women. The table they had hit bore a rich white tablecloth, though it was now wadded in a bunch, the table legs shattered and the table itself at an angle.

A man sat at the table's head. Waxillium managed to stand up in the wreckage and level a gun at the fellow, who had a blocky face and dark blue-grey skin—the mark of a man with koloss heritage. Granite Joe. Waxillium appeared to have interrupted his dinner, judging by the napkin tucked into his collar and the spilled soup on the broken table in front of him.

Lessie groaned, rolling over and brushing splinters off her clothing. Her rifle had apparently been left upstairs. Waxillium held his gun in a firm grip as he eyed the two duster-wearing bodyguards behind Granite Joe, a man and a woman—siblings, he'd heard, and crack shots. They'd been surprised by his fall, obviously, for though they'd rested hands on their weapons, they hadn't drawn.

Waxillium had the upper hand, with the gun on Joe—but if he *did* shoot, the siblings would kill him in a heartbeat. Perhaps he hadn't thought through this line of attack quite as well as he should have.

Joe scraped at the remnants of his broken bowl, framed by splatters of red soup on the tablecloth. He managed to get some onto his spoon and lifted it to his lips. "You," he said after sipping the soup, "should be dead."

"You might want to look at hiring a new group of thugs," Waxillium said. "The ones upstairs aren't worth much."

“I wasn’t referring to them,” Joe said. “How long have you been up here, in the Roughs, making trouble? Two years?”

“One,” Waxillium said. He’d been up here longer, but he had only recently started “making trouble,” as Joe put it.

Granite Joe clicked his tongue. “You think your type is new up here, son? Wide-eyed, with a low-slung gunbelt and bright new spurs? Come to reform us of our uncivilized ways. We see dozens like you every year. The others have the decency to either learn to be bribed, or to get dead before they ruin too much. But not you.”

He’s stalling, Waxillium thought. Waiting for the men upstairs to run down.

“Drop your weapons!” Waxillium said, holding his gun on Joe. “Drop them or I shoot!”

The two guards didn’t move. *No metal lines on the guard on the right,* Waxillium thought. *Or on Joe himself.* The one on the left had a handgun, perhaps trusting the speed of his draw against a Coinshot. The other two had fancy hand-crossbows in their holsters, he bet. Single-shot, made of wood and ceramic. Built for killing Coinshots.

Even with Allomancy, Waxillium would never be able to kill all three of them without getting shot himself. Sweat trickled down his temple. He was tempted to just pull his trigger and shoot, but he’d be killed if he did that. And they knew it. It was a standoff, but *they* had reinforcements coming.

“You don’t belong here,” Joe said, leaning forward, elbows on his broken table. “We came here to escape folks like you. Your rules. Your assumptions. We don’t want you.”

“If that were true,” Waxillium said, surprised at how level his voice was, “then people wouldn’t come to me crying because you killed their sons. You might not need Elendel’s laws up here, but that doesn’t mean you don’t need any laws at all. And it doesn’t mean men like you should be able to do whatever you want.”

Granite Joe shook his head, standing up, hand to his holster. “This isn’t your habitat, son. Everyone has a price up here. If they don’t, they don’t fit in. You’ll die, slow and painful, just like a lion would die in that city of yours. What I’m doing today, this is a mercy.”

Joe drew.

Waxillium reacted quickly, Pushing himself off the wall lamps to his right. They were firmly anchored, so his Allomantic shove Pushed him to the left.

He twisted his gun and fired.

Joe got his crossbow out and loosed a bolt, but the shot missed, zipping through the air where Waxillium had been. Waxillium's own bullet flew true for once, hitting the female guard, who had pulled out her crossbow. She dropped, and as Waxillium crashed into the wall, he Pushed—knocking the gun out of the other guard's hand as the man fired.

Waxillium's Push, unfortunately, also flung his own gun out of his hand—but sent it spinning toward the second bodyguard. His gun smacked the man right in the face, dropping him.

Waxillium steadied himself, looking across the room at Joe, who seemed baffled that both his guards were down. No time to think. Waxillium scrambled toward the large, koloss-blooded man. If he could reach some metal to use as a weapon, maybe—

A weapon clicked behind him. Waxillium stopped and looked over his shoulder at Lessie, who was pointing a small hand-crossbow right at him.

"Everyone up here has a price," Granite Joe said.

Waxillium stared at the crossbow bolt, tipped with obsidian. Where had she been carrying that? He swallowed slowly.

She put herself in danger, scrambling up the stairs with me! he thought. *How could she have been …*

But Joe had known about his Allomancy. So had she. Lessie *knew* he could spoil the thugs' aim, when she'd joined him in running up the steps.

"Finally," Joe said, "do you have an explanation of why you didn't just *shoot* him in the saloon room, where the barkeep put him?"

She didn't respond, instead studying Waxillium. "I did warn you that everyone in the saloon was in Joe's employ," she noted.

"I…" Waxillium swallowed. "I still think your legs are pretty."

She met his eyes. Then she sighed, turned the crossbow, and shot Granite Joe in the neck.

Waxillium blinked as the enormous man dropped to the floor, gurgling as he bled.

"That?" Lessie said, glaring at Waxillium. "That's all you could come up with to win me over? 'You have nice legs'? Seriously? You are *so* doomed up here, Cravat."

Waxillium breathed out in relief. "Oh, *Harmony*. I thought you were going to shoot me for sure."

"Should have," she grumbled. "I can't believe—"

She cut off as the stairs clattered, the troop of miscreants from above having finally gathered the nerve to rush down the stairwell. A good half dozen of them burst into the room with weapons drawn.

Lessie dove for the fallen bodyguard’s gun.

Waxillium thought quickly, then did what came most naturally. He struck a dramatic pose in the rubble, one foot up, Granite Joe dead beside him, both bodyguards felled. Dust from the broken ceiling still sprinkled down, illuminated in sunlight pouring through a window above.

The thugs pulled to a stop. They looked down at the fallen corpse of their boss, then gaped toward Waxillium.

Finally, looking like children who had been caught in the pantry trying to get at the cookies, they lowered their weapons. The ones at the front tried to push through the ones at the back to get away, and the whole clamorous mess of them swarmed back up the steps, leaving the forlorn barkeep, who fled last of all.

Waxillium turned and offered his hand to Lessie, who let him pull her to her feet. She looked after the retreating group of bandits, whose boots thumped on wood in their haste to escape. In moments the building was silent.

“Huh,” she said. “You’re as surprising as a donkey who can dance, Mister Cravat.”

“It helps to have a thing,” Waxillium noted.

“Yeah. You think I should get a thing?”

“Getting a thing has been one of the most important choices I made in coming up to the Roughs.”

Lessie nodded slowly. “I have no idea what we’re talking about, but it sounds kinda dirty.” She glanced past him toward Granite Joe’s corpse, which stared lifelessly, lying in a pool of his own blood.

“Thanks,” Waxillium said. “For not murdering me.”

“Eh. I was gonna kill him eventually anyway and turn him in for the bounty.”

“Yes, well, I doubt you were planning to do it in front of his entire gang, while trapped in a basement with no escape.”

“True. Right stupid of me, that was.”

“So why do it?”

She kept looking at the body. “I’ve done plenty of things in Joe’s name I wish I hadn’t, but as far as I know, I never shot a man who didn’t deserve it.

Killing you … well, seems like it would have been killing what you stood for too. Ya know?"

"I think I can grasp the concept."

She rubbed at a bleeding scratch on her neck, where she'd brushed broken wood during their fall. "Next time, though, I hope it won't involve making quite so big a mess. I *liked* this saloon."

"I'll do my best," Waxillium said. "I intend to change things out here. If not the whole Roughs, then at least this town."

"Well," Lessie said, walking over to Granite Joe's corpse, "I'm sure that if any evil pianos were thinking of attacking the city, they'll have second thoughts now, considering your prowess with that pistol."

Waxillium winced. "You … saw that, did you?"

"Rarely seen such a feat," she said, kneeling and going through Joe's pockets. "Three shots, three different notes, not a single bandit down. That takes skill. Maybe you should spend a little less time with your thing and more with your gun."

"Now *that* sounded dirty."

"Good. I hate being crass by accident." She came out with Joe's pocketbook and smiled, tossing it up and catching it. Above, in the hole Waxillium had made, an equine head poked out, followed by a smaller, teenage one in an oversized bowler hat. Where had he gotten that?

Destroyer blustered in greeting.

"Sure, *now* you come," Waxillium said. "Stupid horse."

"Actually," Lessie said, "seems to me like staying away from you during a gunfight makes her a pretty damn *smart* horse."

Waxillium smiled and held out his hand to Lessie. She took it, and he pulled her close. Then he lifted them out of the wreckage on a line of blue light.

PART ONE

1

SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER

Winsting smiled to himself as he watched the setting sun. It was an ideal evening to auction himself off.

“We have my saferoom ready?” Winsting asked, lightly gripping the balcony banister. “Just in case?”

“Yes, my lord.” Flog wore his silly Roughs hat along with a duster, though he’d never been outside of the Elendel Basin. The man was an excellent bodyguard, despite his terrible fashion sense, but Winsting made certain to Pull on the man’s emotions anyway, subtly enhancing Flog’s sense of loyalty. One could never be too careful.

“My lord?” Flog asked, glancing toward the chamber behind them. “They’re all here, my lord. Are you ready?”

Not turning away from the setting sun, Winsting raised a finger to hush the bodyguard. The balcony, in the Fourth Octant of Elendel, overlooked the canal and the Hub of the city—so he had a nice view of the Field of Rebirth. Long shadows stretched from the statues of the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor in the green park where, according to fanciful legend, their corpses had been discovered following the Great Catacendre and the Final Ascension.

The air was muggy, slightly tempered by a cool breeze off Hammondar Bay a couple of miles to the west. Winsting tapped his fingers on the balcony railing, patiently sending out pulses of Allomantic power to shape the emotions of those in the room behind him. Or at least any foolish enough not to be wearing their aluminum-lined hats.

Any moment now …

Initially appearing as pinprick spots in the air, mist grew before him, spreading like frost across a window. Tendrils stretched and spun about one another, becoming streams—then rivers of motion, currents shifting and blanketing the city. Engulfing it. Consuming it.

“A misty night,” Flog said. “That’s bad luck, it is.”

“Don’t be a fool,” Winsting said, adjusting his cravat.

“He’s watching us,” Flog said. “The mists are His eyes, my lord. Sure as Ruin, that is.”

“Superstitious nonsense.” Winsting turned and strode into the room. Behind him, Flog shut the doors before the mists could seep into the party.

The two dozen people—along with the inevitable bodyguards—who mingled and chatted there were a select group. Not just important, but also very much at odds with one another, despite their deliberate smiles and meaningless small talk. He preferred to have rivals at events like this. Let them all see each other, and let each know the cost of losing the contest for his favor.

Winsting stepped among them. Unfortunately many did wear hats, whose aluminum linings would protect them from emotional Allomancy—though he had personally assured each attendee that none of the others would have Soothers or Rioters with them. He’d said nothing of his own abilities, of course. So far as any of them knew, he wasn’t an Allomancer.

He glanced across the room to where Blome tended bar. The man shook his head. Nobody else in the room was burning any metals. Excellent.

Winsting stepped up to the bar, then turned and raised his hands to draw everyone’s attention. The gesture exposed the twinkling diamond cuff links he wore on his stiff white shirt. The settings were wooden, of course.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “welcome to our little auction. The bidding begins now, and it ends when I hear the offer I like most.”

He said nothing more; too much talk would kill the drama. Winsting took the drink one of his servers offered and stepped out to mingle, then hesitated as he looked over the crowd. “Edwarn Ladrian is not here,” he said softly. He refused to call the man by his silly moniker, Mister Suit.

“No,” Flog said.

“I thought you said everyone had arrived!”

“Everyone who said they were coming,” Flog said. He shuffled, uncomfortable.

Winsting pursed his lips, but otherwise hid his disappointment. He’d been *certain* his offer had intrigued Edwarn. Perhaps the man had bought out one of the other crime lords in the room. Something to consider.

Winsting made his way to the central table, which held the nominal centerpiece of the evening. It was a painting of a reclining woman; Winsting had painted it himself, and he was getting better.

The painting was worthless, but the men and woman in this room would still offer him huge sums for it.

The first one to approach him was Dowser, who ran most of the smuggling operations into the Fifth Octant. The three days of scrub on his cheeks was shadowed by a bowler that, conspicuously, he had not left in the cloakroom. A pretty woman on his arm and a sharp suit did little to clean up a man like Dowser. Winsting wrinkled his nose. Most everyone in the room was a despicable piece of trash, but the others had the decency not to *look* like it.

“It’s ugly as sin,” Dowser said, looking over the painting. “I can’t believe this is what you’re having us ‘bid’ on. A little cheeky, isn’t it?”

“And you’d rather I was completely forthright, Mister Dowser?” Winsting said. “You’d have me proclaim it far and wide? ‘Pay me, and in exchange you get my vote in the Senate for the next year’?”

Dowser glanced to the sides, as if expecting the constables to burst into the room at any moment.

Winsting smiled. “You’ll notice the shades of grey on her cheeks. A representation of the ashen nature of life in a pre-Catacendric world, hmmm? My finest work yet. Do you have an offer? To get the bidding started?”

Dowser said nothing. He would eventually make a bid. Each person in this room had spent weeks posturing before agreeing to this meeting. Half were crime lords like Dowser. The others were Winsting’s own counterparts, high lords and ladies from prominent noble houses, though no less corrupt than the crime lords.

“Aren’t you frightened, Winsting?” asked the woman on Dowser’s arm.

Winsting frowned. He didn’t recognize her. Slender, with short golden hair and a doe-eyed expression, she was uncommonly tall.

“Frightened, my dear?” Winsting asked. “Of the people in this room?”

“No,” she said. “That your brother will find out … what you do.”

“I assure you,” Winsting said. “Replar knows exactly what I am.”

“The governor’s own brother,” the woman said. “Asking for bribes.”

“If that truly surprises you, my dear,” Winsting said, “then you have lived too sheltered a life. Far bigger fish than I have been sold on this market. When the next catch arrives, perhaps you will see.”

That comment caught Dowser’s attention. Winsting smiled as he saw the gears clicking behind Dowser’s eyes. *Yes,* Winsting thought, *I did just imply that my brother himself might be open to your bribery.* Perhaps that would up the man’s offer.

Winsting moved over to select some shrimp and quiche from a server’s tray. “The woman with Dowser is a spy,” Winsting said softly to Flog, who was always at his elbow. “Perhaps in constabulary employ.”

Flog started. “My lord! We checked and double-checked each person attending.”

“Well you missed one,” Winsting whispered. “I’d bet my fortune on it. Follow her after the meeting. If she splits from Dowser for any reason, see that she meets with an accident.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And Flog,” Winsting said, “do be straightforward about it. I won’t have you trying to find a place where the mists won’t be watching. Understand?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Excellent,” Winsting said, smiling broadly as he strolled over to Lord Hughes Entrone, cousin and confidant to the head of House Entrone.

Winsting spent an hour mingling, and slowly the bids started to come in. Some of the attendees were reluctant. They would rather have met him one-on-one, making their covert offers, then slipping back into Elendel’s underbelly. Crime lords and nobles alike, these all preferred to dance around a topic, not discuss it openly. But they did bid, and bid well. By the end of his first circuit of the room, Winsting had to forcibly contain his excitement. No longer would he have to limit his spending. If his brother could—

The gunshot was so unexpected, he at first assumed that one of the servers had broken something. But no. That crack was so sharp, so earsplitting. He'd never heard a gun fired indoors before; he hadn't known just how stunning it could be.

He gaped, the drink tumbling from his fingers as he tried to find the source of the shot. Another followed, then another. It became a storm, various sides firing at one another in a cacophony of death.

Before he could cry for help, Flog had him by the arm, towing him toward the stairs down to the saferoom. One of his other bodyguards stumbled against the doorway, looking with wide eyes at the blood on his shirt. Winsting stared for too long at the dying man before Flog was able to tear him away and shove him into the stairwell.

"What's happening?" Winsting finally demanded as a guard slammed the door behind them and locked it. The bodyguards hurried him down the dim stairway, which was weakly lit by periodic electric lights. "Who fired? What *happened*?"

"No way of knowing," Flog said. Gunfire still sounded above. "Happened too fast."

"Someone just started firing," another guard said. "Might have been Dowser."

"No, it was Darm," another said. "I heard the first shot from his group."

Either way, it was a disaster. Winsting saw his fortune dying a bloody death on the floor above them, and he felt sick as they finally reached the bottom of the stairs and a vaultlike door, which Flog pushed him through.

"I'm going to go back up," Flog said, "see what I can salvage. Find out who caused this."

Winsting nodded and shut the door, locking it from the inside. He settled into a chair to wait, fretting. The small bunker of a room had wine and other amenities, but he couldn't be bothered. He wrung his hands. What would his brother say? Rusts! What would the papers say? He'd have to keep this quiet somehow.

Eventually a knock came at the door, and Winsting glanced through the peephole to see Flog. Behind him, a small force of bodyguards watched the stairwell. It seemed the gunfire had stopped, though from down here it had sounded only like faint popping.

Winsting opened the door. "Well?"

"They're all dead."

“*All* of them?”

“Every last one,” Flog said, walking into the room.

Winsting sat heavily in his chair. “Maybe that’s good,” he said, searching for some glimmer of light in this dark disaster. “Nobody can implicate us. Maybe we can just slip away. Cover our tracks somehow?”

A daunting task. He owned this building. He’d be connected to these deaths. He’d need an alibi. Hell, he was going to *have* to go to his brother. This could cost him his seat, even if the general public never discovered what had happened. He slumped in his chair, frustrated. “Well?” he demanded. “What do you think?”

In response, a pair of hands grabbed Winsting by the hair, pulled his head back, and efficiently slit his exposed throat.

2

I figure I should write one of these things, the small book read. *To tell my side. Not the side the historians will tell for me. I doubt they'll get it right. I don't know that I'd like them to anyhow.*

Wax tapped the book with the end of his pencil, then scribbled down a note to himself on a loose sheet.

"I'm thinking of inviting the Boris brothers to the wedding," Steris said from the couch opposite the one Wax sat upon.

He grunted, still reading.

I know Saze doesn't approve of what I've done, the book continued. *But what did he expect me to do? Knowing what I know …*

"The Boris brothers," Steris continued. "They're acquaintances of yours, aren't they?"

"I shot their father," Wax said, not looking up. "Twice."

I couldn't let it die, the book read. *It's not right. Hemalurgy is good now, I figure. Saze is both sides now, right? Ruin isn't around anymore.*

"Are they likely to try to kill you?" Steris asked.

"Boris Junior swore to drink my blood," Wax said. "Boris the Third—and yes, he's the brother of Boris Junior; don't ask—swore to … what was it? Eat my toes? He's not a clever man."

We can use it. We should. Shouldn't we?

"I'll just put them on the list, then," Steris said.

Wax sighed, looking up from the book. "You're going to invite my mortal enemies," he said dryly, "to our wedding."

"We have to invite *someone*," Steris said. She sat with her blonde hair up in a bun, her stacks of papers for the wedding arrangements settled around her like subjects at court. Her blue flowered dress was fashionable without being the least bit daring, and her prim hat clung to her hair so tightly it might as well have been nailed in place.

"I'm certain there are better choices for invitations than people who want me dead," Wax said. "I hear family members are traditional."

"As a point of fact," Steris said, "I believe your remaining family members actually do want you dead."

She had him there. "Well, yours don't. Not that I've heard anyway. If you need to fill out the wedding party, invite more of them."

"I've invited all of my family as would be proper," Steris said. "And all of my acquaintances that merit the regard." She reached to the side, taking out a sheet of paper. "You, however, have given me only *two* names of people to invite. Wayne and a woman named Ranette—who, you noted, *probably* wouldn't try to shoot you at your own wedding."

"Very unlikely," Wax agreed. "She hasn't tried to kill me in years. Not seriously, at least."

Steris sighed, setting down the sheet.

"Steris…" Wax said. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be flippant. Ranette will be fine. We joke about her, but she's a good friend. She won't ruin the wedding. I promise."

"Then who will?"

"Excuse me?"

"I have known you for an entire year now, Lord Waxillium," Steris said. "I can accept you for who you are, but I am under no illusions. *Something* will happen at our wedding. A villain will burst in, guns firing. Or we'll discover explosives in the altar. Or Father Bin will inexplicably turn out to be an old enemy and attempt to murder you instead of performing the ceremony. It *will* happen. I'm merely trying to prepare for it."

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” Wax asked, smiling. “You’re actually thinking of inviting one of my enemies so you can *plan* for a disruption.”

“I’ve sorted them by threat level and ease of access,” Steris said, shuffling through her papers.

“Wait,” Wax said, rising and walking over. He leaned down next to her, looking over her shoulder at her papers. Each sheet contained a detailed biography. “Ape Manton … The Dashir boys … Rusts! Rick Stranger. I’d forgotten about him. Where did you get these?”

“Your exploits are a matter of public record,” Steris said. “One that is of increasing interest to society.”

“How long did you spend on this?” Wax asked, flipping through the pages in the stack.

“I wanted to be thorough. This sort of thing helps me think. Besides, I wanted to know what you had spent your life doing.”

That was actually kind of sweet. In a bizarre, Steris sort of way.

“Invite Douglas Venture,” he said. “He’s kind of a friend, but he can’t hold his liquor. You can count on him making a disturbance at the after-party.”

“Excellent,” Steris said. “And the other thirty-seven seats in your section?”

“Invite leaders among the seamstresses and forgeworkers of my house,” Wax said. “And the constables-general of the various octants. It will be a nice gesture.”

“Very well.”

“If you want me to help more with the wedding planning—”

“No, the formal request to perform the ceremony that you sent to Father Bin was the only task required of you by protocol. Otherwise I can handle it; this is the perfect sort of thing to occupy me. That said, someday I *would* like to know what is in that little book you peruse so often.”

“I—”

The front door to the mansion slammed open down below, and booted feet thumped up the steps. A moment later, the door to the study burst open and Wayne all but tumbled in. Darriance—the house butler—stood apologetically just behind him.

Wiry and of medium height, Wayne had a round clean-shaven face and—as usual—wore his old Roughs clothing, though Steris had pointedly supplied him with new clothing on at least three occasions.

“Wayne, you could try the doorbell sometime,” Wax said.

“Nah, that warns the butler,” Wayne said.

“Which *is* kind of the point.”

“Beady little buggers,” Wayne said, shutting the door on Darriance. “Can’t trust them. Look, Wax. We’ve got to go! The Marksman has made his move!”

Finally! Wax thought. “Let me grab my coat.”

Wayne glanced toward Steris. “’Ello, Crazy,” he said, nodding to her.

“Hello, Idiot,” she said, nodding back.

Wax buckled on his gunbelt over his fine city suit, with vest and cravat, then threw on his mistcoat duster. “Let’s go,” he said, checking his ammunition.

Wayne pushed his way out the door and barreled down the stairs. Wax paused by Steris’s couch. “I…”

“A man must have his hobbies,” she said, raising another sheet of paper and inspecting it. “I accept yours, Lord Waxillium—but *do* try to avoid being shot in the face, as we have wedding portraits to sit for this evening.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“Keep an eye on my sister out there,” Steris said.

“This is a dangerous chase,” Wax said, hastening to the door. “I doubt Marasi will be involved.”

“If you think that, then your professional faculties are suspect. It’s a dangerous chase, so she’ll *find* a way to be involved.”

Wax hesitated by the door. He glanced back at her, and she looked up, meeting his eyes. It felt as if there should be something more to their parting. A send-off of some sort. Fondness.

Steris seemed to sense it too, but neither said anything.

Wax tipped his head back, taking a shot of whiskey and metal flakes, then charged through the doorway and threw himself over the balcony railing. He slowed himself with a Push on the silver inlays in the marble floor of the entrance hall, hitting with a thump of boots on stone. Darriance opened the front door ahead of him as he raced out to join Wayne at the coach, for the ride to …

He froze on the steps down to the street. “What the hell is that?”

“Motorcar!” Wayne said from the back seat of the vehicle.

Wax groaned, hastening down the steps and approaching the machine. Marasi sat behind the steering mechanism, wearing a fashionable dress of lavender and lace. She looked much younger than her half sister, Steris, though only five years separated them.

She was a constable now, technically. An aide to the constable-general of this octant. She'd never fully explained to him why she would leave behind her career as a solicitor to join the constables, but at least she'd been hired on not as a beat constable, but as an analyst and executive assistant. She shouldn't be subjected to danger in that role.

Yet here she was. A glint of eagerness shone in her eyes as she turned to him. "Are you going to get in?"

"What are you doing here?" Wax asked, opening the door with some reluctance.

"Driving. You'd rather Wayne do it?"

"I'd rather have a coach and a good team of horses." Wax settled into one of the seats.

"Stop being so old-fashioned," Marasi said, moving her foot and making the devilish contraption lurch forward. "Marksman robbed the First Union, as you guessed."

Wax held on tightly. He'd guessed that Marksman would hit the bank three days ago. When it hadn't happened, he'd thought the man had fled to the Roughs.

"Captain Reddi thinks that Marksman will run for his hideout in the Seventh Octant," Marasi noted, steering around a horse carriage.

"Reddi is wrong," Wax said. "Head for the Breakouts."

She didn't argue. The motorcar thumped and shook until they hit the new section of paving stones, where the street smoothed out and the vehicle picked up speed. This was one of the latest motorcars, the type the broadsheets had been spouting about, with rubber wheels and a gasoline engine.

The entire city was transforming to accommodate them. *A lot of trouble just so people can drive these contraptions,* Wax thought sourly. Horses didn't need ground this smooth—though he did have to admit that the motorcar turned remarkably well, as Marasi took a corner at speed.

It was still a horrible lifeless heap of destruction.

"You shouldn't be here," Wax said as Marasi took another corner.

She kept her eyes forward. Behind them, Wayne leaned halfway out one of the windows, holding his hat to his head and grinning.

"You trained as an attorney," Wax said. "You belong in a courtroom, not chasing a killer."

"I've done well caring for myself in the past. You never complained then."

"Each time, it felt like an exception. Yet here you are again."

Marasi did something with the stick to her right, changing the motor's gears. Wax never had been able to get the hang of that. She darted around several horses, causing one of the riders to shout after them. The swerving motion pushed Wax against the side of the motorcar, and he grunted.

"What's wrong with you lately?" Marasi demanded. "You complain about the motorcar, about me being here, about your tea being too hot in the morning. One would almost think you'd made some horrible life decision that you regret deep down. Wonder what it could be."

Wax kept his eyes forward. In the mirror, he saw Wayne lean back in and raise his eyebrows. "She might have a point, mate."

"You're not helping."

"Wasn't intending to," Wayne said. "Fortunately, I know which horrible life decision she's talkin' about. You really should have bought that hat we looked at last week. It was lucky. I've got a fifth sense for these things."

"Fifth?" Marasi asked.

"Yeah, can't smell worth a heap of beans. I—"

"There," Wax said, leaning forward and looking through the windscreen. A figure bounded out of a side street soaring through the air, landed in the street, then launched himself down the thoroughfare ahead of them.

"You were right," Marasi said. "How did you know?"

"Marks likes to be seen," Wax said, slipping Vindication from her holster at his side. "Fancies himself a gentleman rogue. Keep this contraption moving steadily, if you can."

Marasi's reply was cut off as Wax threw open the door and leaped out. He fired down and Pushed on the bullet, launching himself upward. A Push on a passing carriage sent it rocking and nudged Wax to the side, so that when he came down, he landed on the wooden roof of Marasi's motorcar.

He grabbed the roof's front lip in one hand, gun up beside his head, wind blowing his mistcoat out behind him. Ahead, Marks bounded down the thoroughfare in a series of Steelpushes. Deep within, Wax felt the comforting burn of his own metal.

He propelled himself off the motorcar and out over the roadway. Marks always performed his robberies in daylight, always escaped along the busiest roadways he could find. He liked the notoriety. He probably felt invincible. Being an Allomancer could do that to a man.

Wax sent himself into a series of leaps over motorcars and carriages, passing the tenements on either side. The rushing wind, the height and perspective, cleared his mind and calmed his emotions as surely as a Soother's touch. His worries dissolved, and for the moment there was only the chase.

The Marksman wore red, an old busker's mask covering his face—black with white tusks, like a demon of the Deepness from old stories. And he was connected to the Set, according to the appointment book Wax had stolen from his uncle. After so many months the usefulness of that book was waning, but there were still a few gems to exploit.

Marks Pushed toward the industrial district. Wax followed, bounding from motorcar to motorcar. Amazing how much more secure he felt while hurtling through the afternoon air, as opposed to being trapped in one of those horrible motorized boxes.

Marks spun in midair and released a handful of something. Wax Pushed himself off a lamppost and jerked to the side, then shoved Marks's coins as they passed, sending them out of the way of a random motorcar below. The motor swerved anyway, running toward the canal, the driver losing control.

Rust and Ruin, Wax thought with annoyance, Pushing himself back toward the motorcar. He tapped his metalmind, increasing his weight twentyfold, and came down on the hood of the motorcar.

Hard.

The smash crushed the front of the motorcar into the ground, grinding it against the stones, slowing and then stopping its momentum before it could topple into the canal. He caught a glimpse of stunned people inside, then released his metalmind and launched himself in a Push after Marks. He almost lost the man, but fortunately the red clothing was distinctive. Wax spotted him as he bounded up off a low building, then Pushed himself high along the side of one of the city's shorter skyscrapers. Wax followed, watching as the man Pushed himself in through a window on the top floor, some twelve or fourteen stories up.

Wax shot up into the sky, windows passing him in a blur. The city of Elendel stretched out all around, smoke rising from coal plants, factories, and homes in countless spouts. He neared the top floor one window to the left of where Marks had entered, and as he landed lightly on the stonework ledge, he tossed a coin toward the window Marks had used.

The coin bounced against the glass. Gunfire sprayed out of the window. At the same time, Wax increased his weight and smashed through his own window by leaning against it, entering the building. He skidded on glass, raising Vindication toward the plaster wall separating him from Marks.

Translucent blue lines spread around him, pointing in a thousand different directions, highlighting bits of metal. The nails in a desk behind him, where a frightened man in a suit cowered. The metal wires in the walls, leading to electric lamps. Most importantly, a few lines pointed *through* the wall into the next room. These were faint; obstructions weakened his Allomantic sense.

One of those lines quivered as someone in there turned and raised a gun. Wax rolled Vindication's cylinder and locked it into place.

Hazekiller round.

He fired, then *Pushed*, flaring his metal and drilling that bullet forward with as much force as he could. It tore through the wall as if it were paper.

The metal in the next room dropped to the floor. Wax threw himself against the wall, increasing his weight, cracking the plaster. Another slam with his shoulder smashed through, and he broke into the next room, weapon raised, looking for his target.

He found only a pool of blood soaking into the carpet and a discarded submachine gun. This room was some kind of clerk's office. Several men and women pressed against the floor, trembling. One woman raised a finger, pointing out a door. Wax gave her a nod and crouched against the wall next to the doorway, then cautiously glanced out.

With a painful grating sound, a filing cabinet slid down the hallway toward him. Wax ducked back out of the way as it passed, then leaped out and aimed.

His gun immediately lurched backward. Wax grabbed it with both hands, holding tight, but a second Push launched his other pistol out of its holster. His feet started to skid, his gun hauling him backward, and he growled, but finally dropped Vindication. She tumbled all the way down the hall to fetch up beside the ruins of the filing cabinet, which had crashed into the wall there. He would have to come back for her once this was over.

Marks stood at the other end of the hallway, lit by soft electric lights. He bled from a shoulder wound, his face hidden by the black-and-white mask.

“There are a thousand criminals in this city far worse than I am,” a muffled voice said from behind the mask, “and yet you hunt *me,* lawman. Why? I’m a hero of the people.”

“You stopped being a hero weeks ago,” Wax said, striding forward, mistcoat rustling. “When you killed a child.”

“That wasn’t my fault.”

“You fired the gun, Marks. You might not have been aiming for the girl, but *you fired the gun*.”

The thief stepped back. The sack slung on his shoulder had been torn, either by Wax’s bullet or some shrapnel. It leaked banknotes.

Marks glared at him through the mask, eyes barely visible in the electric light. Then he dashed to the side, holding his shoulder as he ran into another room. Wax Pushed off the filing cabinet and threw himself in a rush down the hallway. He skidded to a stop before the door Marks had gone in, then Pushed off the light behind, bending it against the wall and entering the room.

Open window. Wax grabbed a handful of pens from a desk before throwing himself out the window, a dozen stories up. Banknotes fluttered in the air, trailing behind Marks as he plummeted. Wax increased his weight, trying to fall faster, but he had nothing to Push against and the increased weight helped only slightly against air resistance. Marks still hit the ground before him, then Pushed away the coin he’d used to slow himself.

A pair of dropped pens—with metal nibs—Pushed ahead of himself into the ground was enough, barely, to slow Wax.

Marks leaped away, bounding out over some streetlamps. He bore no metal on his body that Wax could spot, but he moved a lot more slowly than he had earlier, and he trailed blood.

Wax followed him. Marks would be making for the Breakouts, a slum where the people still covered for him. They didn’t care that his robberies had turned violent; they celebrated that he stole from those who deserved it.

Can’t let him reach that safety, Wax thought, Pushing himself up over a lamppost, then shoving on it behind him to gain speed. He closed on his prey, who checked on Wax with a frantic glance over his shoulder. Wax raised one of the pens, gauging how risky it would be to try to hit Marks in the leg. He didn’t want a killing blow. This man knew something.

The slums were just ahead.

Next bound, Wax thought, gripping the pen. Bystanders stared up from the sidewalks, watching the Allomantic chase. He couldn't risk hitting one of them. He had to—

One of those faces was familiar.

Wax lost control of his Push. Stunned by what he'd seen, he barely kept himself from breaking bones as he hit the street, rolling across cobbles. He came to a rest, mistcoat tassels twisted around his body.

He drew himself up on hands and knees.

No. Impossible. NO.

He scrambled across the street, ignoring a stomping black destrier and its cursing rider. That face. That *face*.

The last time he had seen that face, he had shot it in the forehead. Bloody Tan.

The man who had killed Lessie.

"A man was here!" Wax shouted, shoving through the crowd. "Long-fingered, thinning hair. A face almost like a bare skull. Did you see him? Did anyone see him?"

People stared at him as if he were daft. Perhaps he was. Wax raised his hand to the side of his head.

"Lord Waxillium?"

He spun. Marasi had stopped her motorcar nearby, and both she and Wayne were climbing out. Had she actually been able to tail him during his chase? No … no, he'd told her where he thought Marks would go.

"Wax, mate?" Wayne asked. "You all right? What did he do, knock you from the air?"

"Something like that," Wax mumbled, glancing about one last time.

Rusts, he thought. *The stress is digging into my mind.*

"So he got away," Marasi said, folding her arms, looking displeased.

"Not yet he didn't," Wax said. "He's bleeding and dropping money. He'll leave a trail. Come on."

3

"I need you to stay behind as we go into those slums," Wayne said, determined to impress solemnity into his voice. "It's not that I don't want your help. I do. It's just going to be too dangerous for you. You need to stay where I know you're safe. No arguments. I'm sorry."

"Wayne," Wax said, walking past. "Stop talking to your hat and get over here."

Wayne sighed, patting his hat and then forcing himself to put it down and leave it in the motorcar. Wax was a right good fellow, but there were a lot of things he didn't understand. Women for one. Hats for another.

Wayne jogged over to where Wax and Marasi peered into the Breakouts. It seemed a different world in there. The sky inside was strung with clotheslines, derelict bits of clothing dangling like hanged men. Wind blew out of the place, happy to escape, carrying with it uncertain scents. Food half cooked. Bodies half washed. Streets half cleaned.

The tall, compact tenements cast deep shadows even in the afternoon. As if this were the place dusk came for a drink and a chat before sauntering out for its evening duty.

“The Lord Mistborn didn’t want there to be slums in the city, you know,” Marasi said as the three of them entered. “He tried hard to prevent them from growing up. Built nice buildings for the poor, tried to make them last…”

Wax nodded, absently moving a coin across his knuckles as he walked. He seemed to have lost his guns somewhere. Had he bummed some coins off Marasi? It never was fair. When Wayne borrowed coins off folks, he got yelled at. He did forget to ask sometimes, but he always offered a good trade.

As they penetrated deeper into the Breakouts, Wayne lagged behind the other two. *Need a good hat …* he thought. The hat was important.

So he listened for some coughing.

Ah …

He found the chap nestled up beside a doorway, a ratty blanket draped over his knees. You could always find his type in a slum. Old, clinging to life like a man on a ledge, his lungs half full with various unsavory fluids. The old man hacked into a glove-wrapped hand as Wayne settled down on the steps beside him.

“What, now,” the man said. “Who are you?”

“What, now,” Wayne repeated. “Who are you?”

“I’m nobody,” the man said, then spat to the side. “Dirty outer. I ain’t done nothing.”

“I’m nobody,” Wayne repeated, taking his flask from the pocket of his duster. “Dirty outer. I ain’t done nothing.”

Good accent, that was. Real mumbly, a classic vintage, wrapped in a blanket of history. Closing his eyes and listening, Wayne thought he could imagine what people sounded like years ago. He held out the flask of whiskey.

“You trying to poison me?” the man asked. He clipped off words, left out half the sounds.

“You trying to poison me?” Wayne repeated, working his jaw as if his mouth were full of bits of rock he kept trying to chew. Some northern fields mix in this one, for sure. He opened his eyes and tipped the whiskey at the man, who smelled it, then took a sip. Then a swig. Then a gulp.

“So,” the man asked, “you an idiot? I’ve a son that’s an idiot. The real kind, that was born that way. Well, you seem all right anyway.”

“Well, you seem all right anyway,” Wayne said, standing up. He reached over to take the man’s old cotton cap off his head, then gestured toward the whiskey flask.

“In trade?” the man asked. “Boy, you *are* an idiot.”

Wayne pulled on the cap. “Could you say another word that starts with ‘h’ for me?”

“Huh?”

“Rusting wonderful,” Wayne said. He hopped back down the steps onto the street and ditched his duster in a cranny—and along with it his dueling canes, unfortunately. He kept his wooden knucklebones though.

The clothing underneath his duster was Roughs stock, not so different from what they wore in these slums. Buttoned shirt, trousers, suspenders. He rolled up the sleeves as he walked. The clothing was worn, patched in a few places. He wouldn’t trade it for the world. Took years to get clothing that looked right. Used, lived-in.

Be slow to trust a man with clothing that was too new. You didn’t get to wear new, clean clothing by doing honest work.

Wax and Marasi had paused up ahead, speaking to some old women with scarves on their heads and bundles in their arms. Wayne could almost hear what they were saying.

We don’t know nothing.

He came running past here mere moments ago, Wax would say. *Surely you—*

We don’t know nothing. We didn’t see nothing.

Wayne wandered over to where a group of men sat under a dirty cloth awning while eating bruised fruit. “Who’re those outers?” Wayne asked as he sat down, using the accent he’d just picked up from the old man.

They didn’t even question him. A slum like this had a lot of people—too many to know everyone—but you could easily tell if someone belonged or not. And Wayne belonged.

“Conners for sure,” one of the men said. He had a head like an overturned bowl, hairless and too flat.

“They want someone,” another man said. Rust and Ruin, the chap’s face was so pointy, you could have used it to plow a field. “Conners only come here if they want to arrest someone. They’ve never cared about us, and never will.”

"If they did care," bowl-head said, "they'd do something about all those factories and power plants, dumping ash on us. We ain't supposed to live in ash anymore. Harmony said it, he did."

Wayne nodded. Good point, that. These building walls, they *were* ashen. Did people care about that, on the outside? No. Not as long as *they* didn't have to live in here. He didn't miss the glares Wax and Marasi drew, pointed at them by people who passed behind, or who pulled windows closed up above.

This is worse, Wayne thought. *Worse than normal.* He'd have to talk to Wax about it. But for now there was a job to do. "They *are* looking for something."

"Stay out of it," bowl-head said.

Wayne grunted. "Maybe there's money in it."

"You'd turn in one of our own?" bowl-head said with a scowl. "I recognize you. Edip's son, aren't you?"

Wayne glanced away, noncommittal.

"You listen here, son," bowl-head said, wagging his finger. "Don't trust a conner, and *don't* be a rat."

"I ain't a rat," Wayne said, testily. He *wasn't*. But sometimes, a man just needed cash. "They're after Marks. I overheard them. There's a thousand notes on his head, there is."

"He grew up here," plow-face said. "He's one of us."

"He killed that girl," Wayne said.

"That's a lie," bowl-head said. "Don't you go talking to conners, son. I mean it."

"Fine, fine," Wayne said, moving to rise. "I'll just go—"

"You'll sit back down," bowl-head said. "Or I'll rap you something good on your head, I will."

Wayne sighed, sitting back down. "You olders always talk about us, and don't know how it is these days. Working in one of the factories."

"We know more than you think," bowl-head said, handing Wayne a bruised apple. "Eat this, stay out of trouble, and don't go where I can't see you."

Wayne grumbled, but sat back and bit into the apple. It didn't taste half bad. He ate the whole thing, then helped himself to a couple more.

It happened soon enough. The men of the fruit-eating group broke apart, leaving Wayne with a basket full of cores. They split with a few amicable gibes at one another, each of the four men claiming he had some important task to be about.

Wayne stuffed another apple in each pocket, then stood up and sauntered off after bowl-head. He tailed the fellow fairly easily, nodding occasionally at people, who nodded back as if they knew him. It was the hat. Put on a man's hat, surround your mind with his way of thinking, and it changed you. A man in dockworker's clothing passed by, shoulders slumped, whistling a sad tune. Wayne picked up the melody. Rough life that was, working the docks. You had to commute each day on the canal boats—either that or find a bed out near the waterfront of the bay, where you were about as likely to get stabbed as have breakfast.

He'd lived that life as a youth. Had the scars to prove it, he did. But as a chap grew, he wanted more to his days than a fight on every corner and women who couldn't remember his name one day to the next.

Bowl-head ducked into an alley. Well, every rusting street in here felt like an alley. Bowl-head entered an alley's alley. Wayne stepped up to the side of the tiny roadway, then burned bendalloy. Allomancy was a useful trick, that it was. Burning the metal set up a nice little bubble of sped-up time around him. He strolled around the corner, staying inside the bubble—it didn't move when he did, but he could move within it.

Yup. There he was, bowl-head himself, crouching beside a rubbish pile, waiting to see if anyone followed him. Wayne had *almost* made the bubble too big and caught the man in it.

Sloppy, sloppy, Wayne thought. A mistake like that on the docks could cost a man his life. He fished a ratty blanket out of the part of the rubbish pile that was inside his bubble, then wandered back around the corner and dropped the bubble.

Inside the speed bubble, he'd have been moving so quickly bowl-head wouldn't have seen more than a blur—if that. He wouldn't think anything of it, Wayne was certain. If he were wrong, he'd eat his hat. Well, one of Wax's hats at least.

Wayne found a set of steps and settled down. He pulled his cap down half over his eyes, sidled up to the wall in a comfortable position, and spread the blanket around himself. Just another homeless drunk.

Bowl-head was a careful one. He waited inside the alley a whole five minutes before creeping out, looking back and forth, then hastening to a building across the street. He knocked, whispered something, and was let in.

Wayne yawned, stretched, and tossed aside the blanket. He crossed the street to the building that bowl-head had entered, then started checking the shuttered windows. The ancient shutters were so old, a good sneeze might have knocked them off. He had to be careful to avoid getting splinters in his cheeks as he listened at each window in turn.

The men of the slums had an odd sense of morality to them. They wouldn't turn in one of their own to the constables. Not even for a reward. But then again, a chap needed to eat. Wouldn't a man like Marks want to hear just how loyal his friends were?

"… was a pair of conners for sure," Wayne heard at a window. "A thousand notes is a lot, Marks. A whole lot. Now, I'm not saying you can't trust the lads; there's not a bad alloy in the bunch. I *can* say that a little encouragement will help them feel better about their loyalty."

Ratting out a friend: completely off-limits.

Extorting a friend: well, that was just good business sense.

And if Marks didn't act grateful, then maybe he hadn't been a friend after all. Wayne grinned, slipping his sets of wooden knucklebones over his fingers. He stepped back, then charged the building.

He hit the shutters with one shoulder, crashing through, then tossed up a speed bubble the moment he hit the floor. He rolled and came up on his feet in front of Marks—who was inside the speed bubble. The man still wore his red trousers, though he'd removed his mask, and was bandaging his shoulder. He snapped his head up, displaying a surprised face with bushy eyebrows and large lips.

Rusts. No wonder the fellow normally wore a mask.

Wayne swung at his chin, laying him out with one punch. Then he spun, fists up, but the other half-dozen occupants of the room, including bowl-head, stood frozen just outside the edge of his speed bubble. Now that was right lucky.

Wayne grinned, heaving Marks up onto his shoulder. He took his knuckles off, slipping them into his pocket, and got out an apple. He took a juicy bite, waved farewell to bowl-head—who looked forward with glassy eyes, frozen—then tossed Marks out the window and followed after.

Once he passed beyond the edge of his speed bubble, it automatically collapsed.

"What the hell was that!" bowl-head yelled inside.

Wayne heaved the unconscious Marks up onto his shoulder again, then wandered back down the road, chewing on his apple.

* * *

“Let me talk to the next ones,” Marasi said. “Maybe I can get them to say something.”

She felt Waxillium’s eyes on her. He thought she was trying to prove herself to him. Once he’d have been right. Now she was a constable—fully credentialed and in the city’s employ. This was her *job*. Waxillium didn’t agree with her decision, but her actions were not subject to his approval.

Together they walked up to a group of young outcasts sitting on the steps of the slums. The three boys watched them with suspicion, their skin dirty, their too-big clothing tied at the waists and ankles. That was the style, apparently, for youths of the streets. They smelled of the incense they’d been smoking in their pipes.

Marasi stepped up to them. “We’re looking for a man.”

“If you need a man,” one of the boys said, looking her up and down, “I’m right here.”

“Oh please,” Marasi said. “You’re … what, nine?”

“Hey, she knows how long it is!” the boy said, laughing and grabbing his crotch. “Have you been peeking at me, lady?”

Well, that’s a blush, Marasi thought. *Not terribly professional.*

Fortunately, she’d spent time around Wayne and his occasional colorful metaphors. Blushes would happen. She pressed onward. “He came shooting through here less than an hour ago. Wounded, trailing blood, wearing red. I’m sure you know who I’m speaking of.”

“Yeah, the man of hours!” one of the boys said, laughing and referencing a figure from old nursemaid tales. “I know him!”

Treat them like a belligerent witness, she thought. *At a trial. Keep them talking.* She needed to learn how to deal with people like these boys in the real world, not just in sterile practice rooms.

“Yes, the man of hours,” Marasi said. “Where did he go?”

“To the edge of dusk,” the boy said. “Haven’t you heard the stories?”

“I’m fond of stories,” Marasi said, slipping a few coins from her pocketbook. She held them up. Bribery felt like cheating, but … well, she *wasn’t* in court.

The three boys eyed the coins, a sudden hunger flashing in their eyes. They covered it quickly, but perhaps showing off money in this place wasn't terribly wise.

"Let's hear a story," Marasi said. "About where this … man of hours might be staying. The location of dusk, if you will. Here in these tenements."

"We might know that," one of the boys said. "Though, you know, stories cost a lot. More than that."

Behind her, something clinked. Waxillium had gotten out a few coins too. The boys glanced at those, eager, until Waxillium flipped one up into the air and Pushed until it was lost.

The boys grew quiet immediately.

"Talk to the lady," Waxillium said softly, with an edge to his voice. "Stop wasting our time."

Marasi turned to him, and behind her the boys made their decision. They scattered, obviously not wanting to deal with an Allomancer.

"That was very helpful," Marasi said, folding her arms. "Thank you so much."

"They were going to lie to you," Waxillium said, glancing over his shoulder. "And we were drawing the wrong kind of attention."

"I realize they were going to lie," Marasi said. "I was going to catch them in it. Attacking someone's false story is often one of the best methods of interrogation."

"Actually," Waxillium said, "the best method of interrogation involves a drawer and someone's fingers."

"Actually," Marasi said, "it does *not*. Studies show that forced interrogation results in bad information almost all the time. Anyway, what is wrong with you today, Waxillium? I realize you've been flaunting your 'tough Roughs lawman' persona lately—"

"I have not."

"You *have,*" she said. "And I can see why. Out in the Roughs, you acted the gentleman lawman. You yourself told me you clung to civilization, to bring it with you. Well, here you're around lords all the time. You're practically *drowning* in civilization. So instead, you lean on being the Roughs lawman—to bring a little old-fashioned justice to the city."

"You've thought about this a lot," he said, turned away from her, scanning the street.

Rust and Ruin. He thought she was infatuated with him. *Arrogant, brutish … idiot!* She puffed out and stalked away.

She was *not* infatuated. He had made it clear there would be nothing between them, and he was engaged to her sister. That was that. Couldn't the two of them have a professional relationship now?

Wayne lounged on the steps leading up to a nearby building, watching them and sloppily taking bites out of an apple.

"And where have you been?" Marasi asked, walking up to him.

"Apple?" Wayne said, handing another one toward her. "'s not too bruised."

"No thank you. Some of us have been trying to find a killer, not a meal."

"Oh, that." Wayne kicked at something beside him on the ground, hidden in the shadow of the steps. "Yeah, took care of that for you."

"You took … Wayne, that's a person at your feet! Rusts! He's bleeding!"

"Sure is," Wayne said. "Not my fault at all, that. I did knock 'im upside the head though."

Marasi raised a hand to her mouth. It was *him*. "Wayne, where … How…"

Waxillium gently pushed her aside; she hadn't seen him approach. He knelt down, checking Marks's wound. Waxillium then looked up at Wayne and nodded, the two sharing an expression they often exchanged. The closest Marasi had been able to figure, it meant something between "Nice work" and "You're a total git; *I* wanted to do that."

"Let's get him to the constabulary offices," Waxillium said, lifting the unconscious Marks.

"Yes, fine," Marasi said. "But aren't you going to ask *how* he did this? Where he's been?"

"Wayne has his methods," Waxillium said. "In a place like this, they're far better than my own."

"You knew," she said, leveling a finger at Waxillium. "You knew we weren't going to get anywhere asking questions!"

"I suspected," Waxillium said. "But Wayne needs space to try his methods—"

"—onnacount of my being so incredible," Wayne added.

"—so I did my best to find Marks on my own—"

"—onnacount of *him* being unable to accept that I'm better at this sorta thing than he is—"

"—in case Wayne failed."

“Which never happens.” Wayne grinned and took a bite of his apple, hopping off his steps to walk beside Waxillium. “Except that one time. And that other one time. But those don’t matter, onnacount of my getting hit to the head enough times that I can’t remember them.”

Marasi sighed inwardly, falling into step with the two. They had so much history that they moved in concert subconsciously, like two dancers who had performed together countless times. That made life particularly difficult for the newcomer who tried to perform with them.

“Well,” Marasi said to Wayne, “you could at least tell *me* what you did. Perhaps I could learn from your methods.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “Won’t work for you. You’re too pretty. In an unpretty sort of way to me, mind you. Let’s not go around that tree again.”

“Wayne, sometimes you completely baffle me.”

“Only sometimes?” Waxillium asked.

“I can’t give her all I got, mate,” Wayne said, thumbs behind his suspenders. “Gotta save some for everyone else. I dole it out with no respect for privilege, class, sex, or mental capacity. I’m a rusting saint, I am.”

“But *how*,” Marasi said. “How did you find him? Did you make some of these people talk?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I made them not talk. They’re better at that. Comes from practice, I suspect.”

“You should take lessons,” Waxillium added.

Marasi sighed as they approached the entrance to the Breakouts. The human flotsam who earlier had cluttered the stairwells and alleyways in here had melted away, perhaps finding the attention of several lawmen too discomforting. It—

Waxillium stiffened. Wayne did as well.

“What—?” Marasi began, right as Waxillium dropped Marks and reached for his mistcoat pocket. Wayne shoved his shoulder into Marasi, pushing her away as something zipped down out of the air and clacked against the paving stones where they’d been standing. More projectiles followed, though she wasn’t really looking. She instead let Wayne tow her to relative cover beside a building, then both of them began craning to search the skyline for the sniper. Waxillium took to the air with a dropped coin, a dark rush of twisting mistcoat tassels. At times like this he looked more primal, like one of the ancient Mistborn from the legends. Not a creature of law, but a sliver of the night itself come to collect its due.

“Aw, hell,” Wayne said, nodding toward Marks. The body slumped in the middle of the road, and now had a prominent wooden shaft sticking out of it.

“Arrow?” Marasi asked.

“Crossbow bolt,” Wayne said. “Haven’t seen one of those in years. You really only want them for fighting Allomancers.” He looked up. Above, Waxillium gave chase, soaring toward the top of one of the buildings.

“Stay here,” Wayne said, then dashed off down an alleyway.

“Wait—” Marasi said, raising a hand.

But he was gone.

Those two, she thought in annoyance. Well, obviously someone didn’t want Marks to be captured and spill what he knew. Perhaps she could learn something from the crossbow bolt or the corpse itself.

She knelt down beside the body, checking first to make certain he was dead—hoping perhaps that the crossbow bolt had not finished the job. He *was* dead, unfortunately. The bolt was firmly lodged in the head. Who knew that a crossbow could penetrate a skull like that? Marasi shook her head, reaching into her handbag to get her notepad and do a write-up of the position the body had fallen in.

You know, she thought. *The assassin is lucky. They were gone so fast, they couldn’t have known that they dealt a killing blow. If I were looking to make sure Marks was finished off, I’d certainly …*

She heard something click behind her.

… double back and check.

Marasi turned slowly to find a ragged-looking man leaving an alleyway, holding a crossbow. He inspected her with dark eyes.

The next part happened quickly. Before Marasi had time to take a step, the man rushed her. He fired the crossbow over his shoulder—causing a Wayne-like yelp to come out of the alleyway—then grabbed Marasi by the shoulder as she tried to run.

He whipped her about, raising something cold to her neck. A glass dagger. Waxillium dropped to the ground in front of them, mistcoat unfurling around him.

The two stared at one another, a coin in Waxillium’s right hand. He rubbed it with his thumb.

Remember your hostage training, woman! Marasi thought. *Most men take a hostage out of desperation.* Could she use her Allomancy? She could slow time around her, speeding it up for everyone outside her speed bubble. The opposite of what Wayne could do.

But she hadn't swallowed any cadmium. Stupid! A mistake the other two would never make. She needed to stop being embarrassed with her powers, weak though they were. She'd used them effectively on more than one occasion.

The man breathed in and out raggedly, his head right next to hers. She could feel the stubble of his chin and cheek against her skin.

Men who take hostages don't want to kill, she thought. *This isn't part of the plan. You can talk him down, speak comforting words, seek common ground and build upon it.*

She didn't do any of that. Instead, she whipped her hand out of her handbag, gripping the small, single-shot pistol she kept inside. Before even considering what she was doing, she pressed the barrel against the man's chin, pulled the trigger …

And blew the bottom of his head up out of the top.

4

Wax lowered his hand, looking at the new corpse beside Marasi. Her shot had taken off a big chunk of the face. Identifying the man would be near impossible.

It would have been anyway. Suit’s minions were notoriously difficult to trace.

Don’t worry about that right now, he thought, taking out a handkerchief. He walked over and held it up to Marasi, who stood with wide eyes, blood and bits of flesh sprayed across her face. She stared straight ahead and did not look down. She’d dropped the pistol.

“That was…” she said, eyes ahead. “That was…” She took a deep breath. “That was unexpected of me, wasn’t it?”

“You did well,” Wax said. “People assume a captive to be in their power. Often the best way to escape is by fighting back.”

“What?” Marasi said, finally taking the handkerchief.

“You discharged a pistol right beside your head,” Wax said. “You are going to have trouble hearing. Rusts … you’ve probably done some permanent damage to your ear. Hopefully it won’t be too bad.”

“What?”

Wax gestured toward her face, and she looked at the handkerchief, as if seeing it for the first time. She blinked, then glanced down. She looked away from the corpse immediately and began wiping at her face.

Wayne, grumbling, staggered out of the alleyway, a new hole in his clothing at the shoulder and a crossbow bolt in his hand.

“So much for interrogating him,” Marasi said with a grimace.

“It’s all right,” Wax said. “Living was more important.”

“… What?”

He smiled at her reassuringly as Wayne waved to some other constables, who had finally arrived on the scene and were making their way into the slums.

“Why does this keep happening to me?” Marasi asked. “Yes, I know I won’t be able to hear your reply. But this is … what, the third time someone has tried to use me as a hostage? Do I *exude* indefensibility or something?”

Yes, you do, Wax thought, though he didn’t say it. *That’s a good thing. It makes them underestimate you.* Marasi was a strong person. She thought clearly in times of stress; she did what needed to be done, even if it was unpleasant. However, she was also very keen on dressing nicely and making herself up.

Lessie would have had none of that. The only times Wax had seen her in a dress were when they’d made the occasional trip to Covingtar to visit the Pathian gardens there. He smiled, remembering a time she’d actually worn trousers *under* the dress.

“Lord Ladrian!” Constable Reddi trotted over, wearing the uniform of a captain in the constabulary. The lean man had a neatly clipped, drooping mustache.

“Reddi,” Wax said, nodding to him. “Is Aradel here?”

“The constable-general is engaged in another investigation, my lord,” Reddi said with a crisp tone. Why did Wax always want to smack this man after talking to him? He was never insulting, always impeccably proper. Maybe that was reason enough.

Wax pointed toward the buildings. “Well, if you’d kindly have your men secure the area; we should probably question those nearby and see if, by some miracle, we can discover the identity of the man Lady Colms just killed.”

Reddi saluted, though it wasn't technically necessary. Wax had a special deputized forbearance in the constabulary, allowing him to do things like … well, jump through the city armed and firing. But he wasn't in their command structure.

The other constables moved to do as he requested anyway. As he glanced at the Marksman, Wax forcibly kept his anger in check. At this rate, he would *never* track down his uncle Edwarn. Wax had only the slightest hint of what the man was trying to accomplish.

It can make anyone into an Allomancer, you see.… If we don't use it, someone else will.

Words from the book Ironeyes had given him.

"Excellent work, my lord," Reddi said in a calm voice, nodding to the fallen Marksman. The clothing was distinctive. "Another miscreant dealt with, and with your customary efficiency."

Wax said nothing. Today's "excellent work" was just another dead end.

"Hey, look!" Wayne said nearby. "I think I found one of that fellow's teeth! That's good luck, ain't it?"

Marasi looked woozy, settling down on a nearby set of steps. Wax was tempted to go comfort her, but would she interpret it the wrong way? He didn't want to lead her on.

"My lord, could we talk?" Reddi said as more constables flooded the area. "I mentioned the constable-general and another case. I was actually already on my way to find you when we heard of your chase here."

Wax turned to him, immediately alert. "What has happened?"

Reddi grimaced, showing uncharacteristic emotion. "It's bad, my lord," he said more softly. "*Politics* is involved."

Then Suit might be involved as well. "Tell me more."

"It, well, it's connected to the governor, my lord. His brother, you see, was hosting an auction last night. And, well, you should see for yourself.…"

* * *

Marasi didn't miss Waxillium grabbing Wayne by the shoulder and pointing toward a waiting constabulary carriage. He didn't come for her. How long would it be before that damnable man was willing to accept her as, if not an equal, a colleague?

Frustrated, she made toward the carriage. Unfortunately, she ran into Captain Reddi on the way. He spoke, and she had to strain her ringing ears—

and guess a little—to figure out what he was saying.

"Constable Colms. You are out of uniform."

"Yes, sir," she said. "It is my day off, sir."

"Yet here you are," he said, hands clasped behind his back. "How is it that you find your way, consistently, into situations like this, despite *explicitly* being told that it is not your assignment, as you are not a field constable?"

"Pure happenstance I'm sure, sir," Marasi said.

He gave her a sneer at that. Funny. He usually saved those for Waxillium, when the man wasn't looking. He said something she couldn't make out, then nodded toward the motorcar she'd brought—which was technically constabulary property; she'd been told to become proficient in driving motorcars and report on their effectiveness to the constable-general. He wanted to test them as replacements for horse-drawn carriages.

"Sir?" she said.

"You've obviously been through a great deal this day, constable," Reddi said, more loudly. "Don't argue with me on this. Head home, clean up, and report for duty tomorrow."

"Sir," Marasi said. "I'd like to brief Captain Aradel on my pursuit of the Marksman, and his subsequent demise, before the details become fuzzy. He will be interested, as he's followed this case personally."

She stared Reddi in the eyes. He outranked her, yes, but he wasn't her boss. Aradel was that to both of them.

"The constable-general," Reddi said with some obvious reluctance, "is away from the offices at the moment."

"Well then, I'll report to him and let him dismiss me, sir," Marasi said. "If that is his wish."

Reddi ground his teeth and started to say something, but a call from one of the other constables diverted him. He waved toward the motorcar, and Marasi took it as dismissal to do as she'd said. So, when the carriage with Waxillium pulled away, she followed in the motor.

By the time the trip had ended, at a fashionable mansion overlooking the city's Hub, she had started to recover. She was still feeling shaken, though she hoped she didn't show it, and she could hear with her left ear, if not on the other side, where she'd fired the gun.

As she climbed out of the motorcar, she found herself wiping her cheek again with her handkerchief, though she had long since cleaned off the blood. Her dress had been thoroughly ruined. She grabbed her constable's coat from the back of the motorcar and threw it over the top to hide the stains, then rushed over to join Waxillium and the others as they descended from the carriage.

Only one other constabulary carriage, she noted, inspecting the drive. Whatever had happened here, Aradel didn't want to make a big show of it. As Waxillium walked up toward the front, he glanced about and found her, then waved her over to him.

"Do you know what this might be about?" he asked her quietly as Reddi and several other constables conferred near the carriage.

"No," Marasi said. "They didn't brief you?"

Waxillium shook his head. He glanced down at her bloodied dress, which peeked out underneath the sturdy brown jacket. He made no comment however, instead striding up the steps, tailed by Wayne.

Two constables, a man and a woman, guarded the door into the mansion. They saluted as Reddi caught up to Waxillium—pointedly ignoring Marasi—and led the way in through the doors. "We've tried to keep this very tightly controlled," Reddi said. "But word will get out, with Lord Winsting involved. Rusts, this is going to be a nightmare."

"The *governor's brother*?" Marasi asked. "What happened here?"

Reddi pointed up a set of steps. "We should find Constable-General Aradel in the grand ballroom. I warn you, this is not a sight for delicate stomachs." He glanced at Marasi.

She raised an eyebrow. "Not an hour ago, I had a man's head *literally* explode all over me, Captain. I believe I will be fine."

Reddi said nothing further, leading the way up the steps. She noticed Wayne pocketing a small, decorative cigar box they passed—Citizen Magistrates brand—replacing it with a bruised apple. She'd have to see that he swapped the cigar box back at some point.

The ballroom upstairs was littered with bodies. Marasi and Waxillium stopped in the doorway, looking in at the chaos. The dead men and women wore fine clothes, sleek ball gowns or tight black suits. Hats lay tumbled from heads, the fine tan carpet stained red in wide patches around the fallen. It was as if someone had tossed a basket of eggs into the air and let them fall, their insides seeping out all over the floor.

Claude Aradel, constable-general of the Fourth Octant, picked through the scene. In many ways, he didn't look like a constable should. His rectangular face had a few days' worth of red stubble on it; he shaved when the mood struck him. His leathery skin, furrowed with wrinkles, attested to days spent in the field, not behind a desk. He was probably pushing sixty at this point, though he wouldn't divulge his true age, and even the octant records had a question mark next to his birth date. What was certain was that Aradel didn't have a drop of noble blood in him.

He'd left the constabulary about ten years ago, giving no official reason for his departure. Rumor was he'd hit the silent ceiling on promotions a man could get without being noble. A lot could change in ten years though, and when Brettin had retired—soon after the execution of Miles Hundredlives almost a year ago—the hunt for a new constable-general had landed on Aradel. He'd come out of retirement to accept the position.

"Ladrian," he said, looking up from a corpse. "Good. You're here." He crossed the room and gave a glance to Marasi, who saluted. He didn't dismiss her.

"Aw," Wayne said, peeking in, "the fun is already over."

Waxillium stepped into the room, taking Aradel's proffered hand. "That's Chip Erikell, isn't it?" Waxillium asked, nodding to the nearest corpse. "Thought to run smuggling in the Third Octant?"

"Yes," Aradel said.

"And Isabaline Frellia," Marasi said. "Rusts! We have a file on her as tall as Wayne, but the prosecutors have never been able to charge her."

"Seven of these bodies belong to people of equivalent notoriety," Aradel said, pointing to several corpses among the fallen. "Most from crime syndicates, though a few were members of noble houses with … dubious reputations. The rest were high-ranking representatives from other important factions. We have near thirty notable stiffs, along with a handful of guards each."

"That's half of the city's criminal elite," Waxillium said softly, crouching down beside a body. "At least."

"All people we've never been able to touch," Aradel said. "Not for lack of trying, mind you."

"So why is everyone so grim?" Wayne asked. "We should be throwing a bloomin' party, shouldn't we? Someone went and did our work for us! We can take the month off."

Marasi shook her head. "A violent change in power in the underworld can be dangerous, Wayne. This was a hit of huge ambition, someone eliminating rivals wholesale."

Aradel glanced at her, then nodded in agreement. She felt a surge of satisfaction. The constable-general was the one who had hired her, picking her application out of a dozen others. Every other person in the pile had had years of constable experience. Instead, he'd chosen a recently graduated law student. He saw something promising in her, obviously, and she intended to prove him right.

"I can't fathom someone doing this," Waxillium said. "Toppling so many of the city's underworld powers at once won't favor the perpetrators; that's a myth from penny novels. Murders on this scale will just draw attention and unify opposition from every other surviving gang and faction as soon as word gets out."

"Unless it was done by an outsider," Marasi said. "An uncertain element from the start, someone who stands to gain if the entire system crumbles."

Aradel grunted, and Waxillium nodded in agreement.

"But how," Waxillium whispered. "How did someone achieve this? Surely their security must have rivaled any in the city." He began moving about, pacing off distances, looking at certain bodies, then at others, whispering to himself as he periodically knelt down.

"Reddi said that the governor's brother was involved, sir?" Marasi asked Aradel.

"Lord Winsting Innate."

Lord Winsting, head of House Innate. He had a vote in the Elendel Senate, a position he gained once his brother was elevated to governor. He had been corrupt. Marasi and the rest of the constables knew it. In retrospect, she wasn't surprised to find him in the middle of something like this. The thing was, Winsting had always seemed a small catch to Marasi.

The governor, however … well, perhaps that hidden file on her desk—full of hints, guesses, and clues—would finally be relevant.

"Winsting," she asked Aradel. "Is he…?"

"Dead?" Aradel asked. "Yes, Constable Colms. From the invitations we found, he initiated this meeting, under the guise of an auction. We located his corpse in a saferoom in the basement."

This drew Waxillium's attention. He stood up, looking directly at them, then muttered something to himself and paced off another body. What was he searching for?

Wayne wandered over to Marasi and Aradel. He took a swig from a silver flask engraved with someone else's initials. Marasi pointedly did not ask him which of the dead he'd taken it from. "So," he said, "our little house leader was friendly with criminals, was he?"

"We've long suspected he was crooked," Aradel said. "The people love his family though, and his brother went to great lengths to keep Winsting's previous lapses out of the limelight."

"You're right, Aradel," Waxillium said from across the room. "This will be bad."

"I dunno," Wayne said. "Maybe he didn't know these folks were all trouble."

"Doubtful," Marasi said. "And even if it were true, it wouldn't matter. Once the broadsheets get ahold of this … The governor's sibling, dead in a house full of known criminals under very suspicious circumstances?"

"What I'm hearing," Wayne said, taking another swig, "is that I was wrong. The fun *isn't* over."

"Many of these people shot one another," Waxillium said.

They all turned to him. He knelt beside another body, inspecting the way it had fallen, then looked up toward some bullet holes in the wall.

Being a lawman, particularly out in the Roughs, had required Waxillium to teach himself a wide variety of skills. He was part detective, part enforcer, part leader, part scientist. Marasi had read a dozen different profiles of him by various scholars, all investigating the mindset of a man who was becoming a living legend.

"What do you mean, Lord Ladrian?" Aradel asked.

"The fight here involved multiple parties," Waxillium said, pointing. "If this was an unexpected hit by someone external—and Lady Colms is right, that would have made the most sense—one would expect the victims to have died from a barrage fired by the enemy who burst in. The corpses don't tell that story. This was a melee. Chaos. Random people firing one at another. I think it began when someone started shooting from the *middle* of the group outward."

"So it *was* one of the attendees who began it," Aradel said.

"Maybe," Waxillium said. "One can only tell so much from the fall of the bodies, the sprays of blood. But something is odd here, very odd.… Were they all shot?"

"No, strangely. A few of the attendees were killed by a knife in the back."

"Have you identified everyone in the room?" Waxillium asked.

“Most of them,” Aradel said. “We wanted to avoid moving them too much.”

“Let me see Lord Winsting,” Waxillium said, standing, his mistcoat rustling.

Aradel nodded to a young constable, and she led them out of the ballroom, through a doorway. Some kind of secret passage? The musty stairwell beyond was narrow enough to force them to walk single file, the constable at the front carrying a lamp.

“Miss Colms,” Waxillium said softly, “what do your statistics tell you about this kind of violence?”

Oh, so we’re using last names now, are we? “Very little. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times something like this has happened. The first place I’d look is for connections between the people killed. Were they all in smuggling, Captain Aradel?”

“No,” he said from behind. “Some smugglers, some extortionists, some gambling tycoons.”

“So it’s not a specific attempt to consolidate power in a certain type of criminal activity,” Marasi said, her voice echoing in the damp stone stairwell. “We need to find the connection, what made these specific people targets. The one most likely behind it is dead.”

“Lord Winsting,” Waxillium said. “You’re saying he lured them here, planned an execution, and it went wrong?”

“It’s one theory.”

“He ain’t that kind of slime,” Wayne said from near the end of the line.

“You know of Winsting?” Marasi asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Not specifically, no,” Wayne said. “But he was a politician. Politician slime is different from regular slime.”

“I find myself agreeing,” Captain Aradel said. “Though I wouldn’t put it so colorfully. We knew that Winsting was crooked, but in the past he kept mostly to small-time schemes. Selling cargo space to smugglers when it suited him, some shady real-estate deals here and there. Cash in exchange for political favors, mostly.

“Recently, rumors started that he was going to put his Senate vote up for sale. We were investigating, with no evidence so far. Either way, killing those willing to pay him would be like blasting your silver mine with dynamite to try finding gold.”

They reached the bottom of the stairwell, where they found four more corpses. The guards, apparently, all killed with bullets to the head.

Waxillium knelt. “Shot from behind, from the direction of the saferoom,” he whispered. “All four, in rapid succession.”

“Executed?” Marasi asked. “How did the killer get them to stand there and take it?”

“He didn’t,” Waxillium said. “He moved too quickly for them to respond.”

“Feruchemist,” Wayne said softly. “Damn.”

They were called Steelrunners, Feruchemists who could store up speed. They’d have to move slowly for a time, then could draw upon that reserve later. Waxillium looked up. Marasi saw something in his eyes, a hunger. He thought his uncle was involved. That was what he thought *every* time a Metalborn committed crimes. Waxillium saw Suit’s shadow over his shoulder each way he turned, the specter of a man whom Waxillium hadn’t been able to stop.

Suit still had Waxillium’s sister, best as they could tell. Marasi didn’t know much of it. Waxillium wouldn’t talk about the details.

He stood up, expression grim, and strode to the door behind the fallen men. He threw it open and entered, Marasi and Wayne close behind, to find a single corpse slumped in an easy chair at the center of the room. His throat had been slit; the blood on the front of his clothing was thick, dried like paint.

“Killed with some sort of long knife or small sword,” Aradel said. “Even more strange, his *tongue* was cut out. We’ve sent for a surgeon to try to tell us more of the wound. Don’t know why the killer didn’t use a gun.”

“Because the guards were still alive then,” Waxillium said softly.

“What?”

“They let the killer pass,” Waxillium said, looking at the door. “It was someone they trusted, perhaps one of their number. They let the murderer into the saferoom.”

“Maybe he was just moving very quickly to get past them,” Marasi said.

“Maybe,” Waxillium agreed. “But that door has to be unlocked from the inside, and it hasn’t been forced. There’s a peephole. Winsting let the murderer in, and he wouldn’t have done that if the guards had been killed. He’s sitting calmly in that chair—no struggle, just a quick slice from behind. Either he didn’t know someone else was in here, or he trusted them. Judging by the way the guards fell outside, they were still focused on the steps, waiting for danger to come. They were still guarding this place. My gut says it was one of their own, someone they let pass, who killed Winsting."

"Rusts," Aradel said softly. "But … a Feruchemist? Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Wayne said, from the doorway. "This wasn't a speed bubble. Can't shoot out of one of those, mate. These fellows were killed before *one* could turn about. Wax is right. Either this is a Feruchemist, or somebody figured out how to fire out of speed bubbles—which is somethin' we'd *really* like to know how to do."

"Someone moving with Feruchemical speed explains the knife deaths up above," Waxillium said, standing. "A few swift executions in the chaos, while everyone else was shooting. Quick and surgical, but the killer would be safe despite the firefight. Captain Aradel, I suggest you gather the names of Winsting's companions and staff. See if any corpses that should be here, aren't. I'll look into the Metalborn side—Steelrunners aren't common, even as Feruchemists go."

"And the press?" Marasi asked.

Waxillium looked to Aradel, who shrugged. "I can't keep a lid on this, Lord Ladrian," Aradel said. "Not with so many people involved. It's going to get out."

"Let it," Waxillium said with a sigh. "But I can't help feeling that's the point of all this."

"Excuse me?" Wayne said. "I thought the point was killing folks."

"Lots of folks, Wayne," Waxillium said. "A shift in power in the city. Were those upstairs the main target? Or was this an attack on the governor himself, a sideways strike upon his house, a message of some sort? Sent to tell Governor Innate that even he is not beyond their reach.…" He tipped Winsting's head back, looking at the gouged-out mouth. Marasi looked away.

"They removed the tongue," Waxillium whispered. "Why? What are you up to, Uncle?"

"Excuse me?" Aradel asked.

"Nothing," Waxillium said, dropping the head back to its slumped position. "I have to go sit for a portrait. I assume you'll be willing to send me a report once you've detailed all of this?"

"I can do that," Aradel said.

"Good," Waxillium said, walking toward the door. "Oh, and Captain?"

“Yes, Lord Ladrian?”

“Prepare for a storm. This wasn’t done quietly; it was done to be noticed. This was a challenge. Whoever did this isn’t likely to stop here.”

PART TWO

5

Wayne tugged on his lucky hat. It was a coachman's hat—something like a wide-brimmed bowler, only one that didn't have three ounces of fancy shoved up its backside. He nodded to himself in his mirror, then wiped his nose. Sniffles. He'd started storing up health the day before, just after finding all those corpses.

He already had a nice cushion of healing he could draw upon, tucked away in his metalmind bracers. He hadn't needed much lately, and always spent days when he had a hangover as sickly as he could manage, since he was going to have an awful time of it anyway. But the way things smelled, with all those important folk dead, warned him. He'd soon need some healing. Best to expand that cushion as he could.

He went light at it today, though. Because it was today, a day when he was going to need some luck. He was tempted to call it the worst day of his life, but that would certainly be an exaggeration. The worst day of his life would be the one when he died.

Might die today though, he thought, looping on his belt and slipping his dueling canes into their straps, then wiping his nose again. *Can't be certain* *yet.* Every man had to die. He’d always found it odd that so many died when they were old, as logic said that was the point in their lives when they’d had the most practice not dying.

He wandered out of his room in Wax’s mansion, idly noticing the scent of morning bread coming from the kitchens. He appreciated the room, though he really only stayed because of the free food. Well, that and because of Wax. The man needed company to keep him from going more strange.

Wayne wandered down a carpeted corridor that smelled of polished wood and servants who had too much time. The mansion was nice, but really, a man shouldn’t live in a place that was so big; it just reminded him how small he was. Give Wayne nice, cramped quarters, and he’d be happier. That way he’d feel like a king, with so much *stuff* it crowded him.

He hesitated outside the door to Wax’s study. What was that sitting on the stand beside the doorway? A new candelabra, pure gold, with a white lace doily underneath. *Exactly* what Wayne needed.

He fished in his pocket. Rich people didn’t make sense at all. That candelabra was probably worth a fortune, and Wax just left it lying around. Wayne fished in his other pocket, looking for something good to trade, and came out with a pocket watch.

Ah, that, he thought, shaking it and hearing the pieces rattle inside. *How long since this thing actually told time?* He picked up the candelabra, pocketed the doily underneath, then put the candelabra back in place with the pocket watch hanging from it. Seemed like a fair trade.

Been needing a new handkerchief, he thought, blowing his nose into it, then pushed open the door and wandered in.

Wax stood before an easel, looking at the large artist’s sketch pad he had filled with intricate plans. “Up all night, were you?” Wayne asked with a yawn. “Rusts, man, you make it hard to loaf about properly.”

“I don’t see what my insomnia has to do with your laziness, Wayne.”

“Makes me look bad, ’sall,” Wayne said, looking over Wax’s shoulder. “Proper loafing requires company. One man lying about is being idle; two men lying about is a *lunch break.*”

Wax shook his head, walking over to look at some broadsheets. Wayne leaned in, inspecting Wax’s paper. It held long lists of ideas, some connected by arrows, with a sketch of the way the bodies had fallen in both the ballroom and the saferoom.

“What’s all this, then?” Wayne asked, picking up a pencil and drawing a little stick figure with a gun shooting at all the dead bodies. His hand trembled as he drew the stick gun, but otherwise it was a right good stick figure.

“Proof to me that a Steelrunner is involved,” Wax said. “Look at the pattern of deaths in the ballroom. Four of the most powerful people in the room were killed with the same gun, and they were the only ones up there killed by that weapon—but it’s the same one that killed the guards outside the saferoom. I’d bet those four above were shot first, dead in an eyeblink, so fast that it sounded like a single long shot. Thing is, judging by the wounds, each shot came from a different location.”

Wayne didn’t know a lot about guns, seeing as how he couldn’t try to use one without his arm doing an impersonation of a carriage on a bumpy road, but Wax was probably right. Wayne moved down to start sketching some stick figures of topless women in the center of the picture, but Wax stepped over and plucked the pencil from his fingers.

“What’s that?” Wayne asked, tapping the center of the sketch pad, where Wax had drawn a bunch of straight lines.

“The pattern the killer used baffles me,” Wax said. “The four people in the party he shot, they all fell while in random conversations—look how they were lying. Everyone else who died was part of the larger shoot-out, but these four, they died while the party was still going on. But why did he shoot them from different directions? See, best I can guess, he fired first here, killing Lady Lentin. Her dropped drink was stomped on many times over the next few minutes. But then the killer used his speed to move quickly over here and fire in another direction. Then he moved again, and again. Why four shots from different places?”

“Who was standing where he shot?”

“The people he killed, obviously.”

“No, I mean, who was standing near him when he fired his gun. Not who did he shoot, but who was he near when he shot?”

“Ahh…” Wax said.

“Yep. Looks to me like he was trying to set them all off,” Wayne said, sniffling. “Get everyone in the room shootin’ at each other. See? It’s like how, to start a bar fight, you throw a bottle at some fellow and then turn to the person next to you and cry out, ‘Hey, why’d you throw that bottle at that nice fellow? Rusts, he looks big. And now he’s comin’ for you, and—’”

“I understand the concept,” Wax said dryly. He tapped the drawing pad. “You might have something.”

“It’s not catching.”

Wax smiled, writing some notes on the side of the pad. “So the killer wanted to sow chaos.… He started a firefight by bouncing around the room, making it look like various parties were attacking one another. They would already have been tense, suspicious of one another.…”

“Yup. I’m a genius.”

“You just recognized this because the killer was making others do his work for him, which is an expertise of yours.”

“As I said. Genius. So how are you going to find him?”

“Well, I was thinking of sending you to the Village to—”

“Not today,” Wayne said.

Wax turned to him, raising his eyebrows.

“It’s the first of the month,” Wayne said.

“Ah. I had forgotten. You don’t need to go *every* month.”

“I do.”

Wax studied him, as if waiting for a further comment or wisecrack. Wayne said nothing. This was actually serious. Slowly, Wax nodded. “I see. Then why haven’t you left yet?”

“Well, you know,” Wayne said. “It’s like I often say…”

“Greet every morning with a smile. That way it won’t know what you’re planning to do to it?”

“No, not that one.”

“Until you know it ain’t true, treat every woman like she has an older brother what is stronger than you are?”

“No, not … Wait, I said that?”

“Yes,” Wax said, turning back to his notes. “It was a very chivalrous moment for you.”

“Rusts. I should really write these things down.”

“I believe that is another thing you often say.” Wax made a notation. “Unfortunately, you’d first have to learn how to write.”

“Now, that’s unfair,” Wayne said, walking over to Wax’s desk and poking around in its drawers. “I can write—I know four whole letters, and one’s not even in my name!”

Wax smiled. “Are you going to tell me what you always say?”

Wayne found a bottle in the bottom drawer and lifted it up, dropping in the lace he'd taken from outside as a replacement. "If you're going to have to do something awful, stop by Wax's room and trade for some of his rum first."

"I don't believe you've ever said that."

"I just did." Wayne took a gulp of the rum.

"I…" Wax frowned. "I have no response to that." He sighed, setting down his pencil. "However, since you're going to be indisposed, then I suppose *I* will have to go visit the Village."

"Sorry. I know you hate that place."

"I will survive," Wax said, grimacing.

"Wanna piece of advice?"

"From you? Probably not. But please feel free."

"You should stop by Wax's room before you go," Wayne said, trailing out toward the door, "and pinch some of his rum."

"The rum you just pocketed?"

Wayne hesitated, then took the rum out of his pocket. "Ah, mate. Sorry. Tough for you." He shook his head. Poor fellow. He pulled the door closed behind him, took a pull on the rum, and continued on his way down the stairs and out of the mansion.

* * *

Marasi tugged at the collar of her jacket, glad for the seaborne wind that blew across her. It could get warm in her uniform—a proper one today, with a buttoned white blouse and brown skirt to match the brown coat.

Next to her, the newsman wasn't so thankful for the wind. He cursed, throwing a heavy chunk of iron—it looked like a piece of an old axle—onto his stack of broadsheets. On the street, the traffic slowed in a moment of congestion. Motorcar drivers and coachmen yelled at one another.

"Ruin break that Tim Vashin," the newsman grumbled, looking at the traffic. "And his machines."

"It's hardly his fault," Marasi said, digging in her pocketbook.

"It is," the newsman said. "Motors were fine, nothing wrong with them for driving in the country or on a summer afternoon. But they're cheap enough now, everyone has to have one of the rusting things! A man can't take his horse two blocks without being run down half a dozen times."

Marasi exchanged coins for a broadsheet. The yelling subsided as the traffic clot loosened, horses and machines once again flowing across the cobbles. She raised the broadsheet, scanning above the fold for stories.

“Say,” the newsman said. “Weren’t you just here?”

“I needed the afternoon edition,” Marasi said absently, walking away.

“Cry of Outrage in the Streets!” the headline read.

> A cry like that of twisting metal sounds through Elendel as people take to the streets, outraged by government corruption. One week after the governor’s veto of bill 775, the so-called workers’-rights manifesto, his brother Winsting Innate has been found dead after an apparent dealing with known criminals.
>
> Winsting was killed in his mansion, perhaps a casualty of constable action against these criminal elements. Among the fallen is the notorious Dowser Maline, long suspected of running ore-smuggling operations into the city, undercutting the work of honest men. The constables admit no culpability for the deaths, but suspicions about the mysterious circumstances have led to a general outcry.

Marasi reached into her handbag and took out the morning edition of the same paper. “Mystery at Lord Winsting’s Mansion!” the headline read.

> Constables have disclosed that Lord Winsting, brother of the governor, was found dead in his mansion home last night. Little is known of the mysterious circumstances of the death, though several members of high society are rumored to have been present.

Every other story in the paper was the same in both editions, save for one report on the floods in the east, which had an extra line updating casualty estimates. The Winsting story had nudged two others off the page, in part because of the size of its headline. The *Elendel Daily* was hardly the most reputable news source in the Basin, but it did know its market. News stories that people agreed with, or were scared by, sold the most copies.

Marasi hesitated on the steps of the Fourth Octant Precinct of the Constabulary. People flowed on the sidewalks, bustling, anxious, heads down. Others loitered nearby, men in the dark jackets of teamsters, hands shoved in pockets, eyes shaded by peaked hats.

Out of work, Marasi thought. *Too many idle men out of work.* Motorcars and electric lights were changing life in Elendel so quickly it seemed that the common man had no hope of keeping up. Men whose families had worked for three generations in the same job suddenly found themselves unemployed. And with the labor disputes at the steel mills …

The governor had recently given political speeches to these men, making promises. More coach lines to compete with rail lines, going places the railroad could not. Higher tariffs on imports from Bilming. Empty promises, mostly, but men losing hope clung to such promises. Winsting’s death could dash those promises. How would people react if they began to wonder if the governor, Replar Innate, was as corrupt as his brother?

A fire is kindling in the city, Marasi thought. She could almost feel the heat coming off the page of the broadsheet in her hands.

She turned and entered the constabulary offices, worrying that Lord Winsting might actually do more harm to Elendel dead than he had alive—which was saying something.

* * *

Wax climbed out of the carriage, nodding to his coachman and indicating that the man should continue on home rather than wait for his master.

Wax pulled on his aluminum-lined hat—broad-brimmed, Roughs style, matching his duster, though he wore a fine shirt and cravat underneath. The hat and mistcoat made him stand out like a man who had brought a shotgun to a knife fight. Workers passed in suspenders and caps, bankers in vests and monocles, constables in helms or bowlers and militaristic coats.

No Roughs hats. Maybe Wayne was right about that; he never would shut up about the importance of a hat. Wax took a deep breath, then stepped into the Village.

It had probably once been just an ordinary city street. A wide one, but still just a street. That was before the trees. They sprouted here, pushing cobblestones aside, creating a dense canopy that ran the length of the thoroughfare.

It was a place that felt like it shouldn't be. No mere park—this was a forest, uncultivated and unmanicured, fresh and primal. You couldn't bring a carriage or motor into the Village; even without the trees, the ground would be too rough now, rolling and uneven. The buildings along the street had been engulfed and become the property of the Village. He couldn't help wondering if this was what all of Elendel would be like without the hand of men. Harmony had made the Basin ferociously fecund; men didn't farm here so much as fight to harvest quickly enough.

Wax strode forward, arrayed as if for battle. Vindication and his Sterrion at his hips, short-barreled shotgun in its holster on his thigh, metal burning inside of him. He pulled the brim of his hat low, and entered another world.

Children wearing simple white smocks played among the trees. Older youths wore the tinningdar, the Terris robe marked with a V pattern running down the front. These looked up from the steps of buildings to watch him pass. The air smelled *soft* here. Soft air. A stupid metaphor, and yet there it was. That smell reminded him of his mother.

Whispers rose around Wax like spring shoots. He kept his eyes forward, trudging across the too-springy ground. There were no gates into or out of the Village, yet you couldn't enter or leave without being identified. Indeed, moments after his entry, a young woman with streaming golden hair was sent running ahead of him to bear news of his arrival.

They've found peace for themselves here, Wax thought. *They've* made *peace for themselves. You shouldn't resent them so.*

After a short walk, he emerged from a stand of trees to find three Terrismen waiting for him, arms folded, all wearing the robes of Brutes, Feruchemists who could increase their strength. Their features were varied enough that one wouldn't have pegged them as relatives. Two had the height that was often the Terris heritage, and one had skin that was darker—some of the Originators from ancient Terris had been dark of skin; Wax's own tan probably came from that lineage. None of the men here had the elongated features seen in the ancient paintings. That was a thing of mythology.

"What is it you need, outsider?" one of the men said.

"I want to speak with the Synod," Wax said.

"Are you a constable?" the man said, looking Wax up and down. Children peeked out from behind nearby trees, watching him.

"Of a sort," Wax said.

"The Terris police themselves," another of the men said. "We have an arrangement."

"I'm aware of the compact," Wax said. "I just need to speak to the Synod, or at least Elder Vwafendal."

"You shouldn't be here, lawman," the lead Terrisman said. "I—"

"It's all right, Razal," a tired voice said from the shadows of a nearby tree.

The three Terrismen turned, then quickly bowed as an old Terriswoman approached. Stately and white-haired, she had darker skin than Wax, and walked with a cane she didn't need. The woman, Vwafendal, studied Wax. He found himself sweating.

Razal, still bowing, spoke with a stubborn tone. "We tried to send him away, Elder."

"He has a right to be here," Vwafendal said. "He has as much Terris blood as you do; more than most."

The Terrisman Brute started, then rose from his bow, peering again at Wax. "You don't mean…"

"Yes," Vwafendal said, looking very tired. "This is he. My grandson."

* * *

Wayne tipped the rum bottle up and teased the last few drops out into his mouth. Then he tucked the bottle into his coat pocket. It was a good bottle. He should be able to trade it for something.

He hopped off the canal boat, giving a wave to Red, the boatman. Nice chap. He would let Wayne bum rides in exchange for a story. Wayne spat a coin out of his mouth—he'd been keeping it in his cheek—and flipped it to Red.

Red caught the coin. "Why is this wet? Were you sucking on it?"

"Allomancers can't Push on my coin if it's in my mouth!" Wayne called.

"You're drunk, Wayne!" Red said with a laugh, shoving off from the dock with his pole.

"Not nearly drunk enough," Wayne called back. "That cheapskate Wax didn't even have the decency to stock a full bottle!"

Red turned the canal boat, poling it out into the waters, wind rippling his cloak. Wayne walked away from the post marking the canal-side mooring, and was faced with the most intimidating sight a fellow could see. The Elendel University.

It was time for Wayne's three tests.

He reached for the rum, then remembered—a little foggily—that he'd finished it all. "Rust and Ruin," he muttered. Perhaps he shouldn't have downed the whole thing. Then again, it made his sniffles easy to ignore. When he was properly smashed, he could take a punch or two to the face and not even feel it. There was a kind of invincibility to that. A stupid kind, but Wayne wasn't a picky man.

He made his way up to the university gates, hands stuffed in his coat pockets. The etched letters over the top proclaimed, in High Imperial, WASING THE ALWAYS OF WANTING OF KNOWING. Deep words. He'd heard them interpreted as, "The eternal desire of a hungry soul is knowledge." When Wayne's soul was hungry he settled for scones, but this place was full of smart kids, and they were a strange sort.

Two men in black coats leaned casually against the gates. Wayne hesitated. So they were watching for him out front this time, were they? The first of his three trials was upon him. Rusting wonderful.

Well, after the nature of any great hero from the stories, he was going to do his best to avoid this particular trial. Wayne ducked to the side before the two men could spot him, then followed the wall. The university was surrounded by the thing, like it was some kind of bunker. Were they afraid all their knowledge would leak out, like water from a swimmer's ears?

Wayne craned his neck, looking for a way in. They'd bricked up the broken part he'd used last time. And the tree he'd climbed that other time had been cut down. Drat on them for that. He decided to follow another great tradition of heroes facing trials. He went looking for a way to cheat.

He found Dims on a nearby corner. The young man wore a bowler hat and a bow tie, but a shirt that had the sleeves ripped off. He was head of one of the more important street gangs in the area, but never stabbed people too badly when he mugged them and was polite with the people he extorted. He was practically a model citizen.

"Hello, Dims," Wayne said.

Dims eyed him. "You a conner today, Wayne?"

"Nope."

"Ah, good," Dims said, settling down on the steps. He took something out of his pocket—a little metal container.

"Here now," Wayne said, wiping his nose. "What's that?"

"Gum."

"Gum?"

"Yeah, you chew it." Dims offered him a piece of the stuff. It was rolled into a ball, soft to the touch and powdered on the outside.

Wayne eyed the lad, but decided to try it. He chewed for a moment.

"Good flavor," he said, then swallowed.

Dims laughed. "You don't *swallow* it, Wayne. You just chew!"

"What's the funna that?"

"It just feels good." He tossed Wayne another ball.

Wayne popped it into his mouth. "How are things," Wayne said, "with you and the Cobblers?"

The Cobblers were the rival gang in the area. Dims and his fellows went about with their sleeves torn. The Cobblers wore no shoes. It apparently made perfect sense to youths of the street, many of whom were the children of the houseless. Wayne liked to keep an eye on them. They were good lads. He'd been like them once.

Then life had steered him wrong. Boys like this, they could use someone to point them in the right direction.

"Oh, you know," Dims said. "Some back, some forth."

"There won't be trouble now, will there?" Wayne asked.

"I thought you said you wasn't no conner today!"

"I ain't," Wayne said, slipping—by instinct—into a dialect more like that of Dims. "I'm askin' as a friend, Dims."

Dims scowled, looking away, but his muttered response was genuine. "We ain't stupid, Wayne. We'll keep our heads. You know we will."

"Good."

Dims glanced back at him as Wayne settled down. "You bring that money you owe me?"

"I owe you money?" Wayne asked.

"From cards?" Dims said. "Two weeks back? Rusts, Wayne, are you drunk? It ain't even noon yet!"

"I ain't drunk," Wayne said, sniffling. "I'm investigatin' alternative states of sobriety. How much do I owe you?"

Dims paused. "Twenty."

"Now see," Wayne said, digging in his pocket, "I distinctly remember borrowin' five off you." He held up a note. It was a fifty.

Dims raised an eyebrow. "You want something from me, I'm guessing?"

"I need into the university."

"The gates are open," Dims said.

"Can't go through the front. They know me."

Dims nodded. That sort of thing was a common complaint in his world. "What do you need from me?"

A short time later, a man wearing Wayne's hat, coat, and dueling canes tried to pass through the front of the university. He saw the two men in black, then bolted as they chased after him.

Wayne adjusted his spectacles, watching them go. He shook his head. Ruffians, trying to get into the university! Scandalous. He walked in through the gates, wearing a bow tie and carrying a load of books. Another of those men—who stood in a more hidden spot, watching his companions chase Dims—barely gave Wayne a glance.

Spectacles. They were kind of like a hat for smart people. Wayne ditched the books inside the square, then walked past a fountain with a statue of a lady who wasn't properly clothed—he idled only a short time—and made his way toward Pashadon Hall, the girls’ dormitory. The building looked an awful lot like a prison: three stories of small windows, stonework architecture, and iron grates that seemed to say “Stay away, boys, if you value your nether parts.”

He pushed his way in the front doors, where he prepared himself for the second of his three tests: the Tyrant of Pashadon. She sat at her desk, a woman built like an ox with a face to match. Her hair even curled like horns. She was a fixture of the university, or so Wayne had been told. Perhaps she had come with the chandeliers and sofas.

She looked up from her desk in the entryway, then threw herself to her feet in challenge. “You!”

“Hello,” Wayne said.

“How did you get past campus security!”

“I tossed them a ball,” Wayne said, tucking the spectacles into his pocket. “Most hounds love having somethin’ to chase.”

The tyrant rumbled around the side of her desk. It was like watching an ocean liner try to navigate city canals. She wore a tiny hat, in an attempt at fashion. She liked to consider herself a part of Elendel upper society, and she kind of was. In the same way that the blocks of granite that made up the steps to the governor’s mansion were a part of civic government.

“You,” she said, spearing Wayne in the chest with a finger. “I thought I told you not to come back.”

“I thought I ignored you.”

“Are you drunk?” She sniffed at his breath.

“No,” Wayne said. “If I were drunk, you wouldn’t look nearly so ugly.”

She huffed, turning away. “I can’t believe your audacity.”

“Really? Because I’m sure I’ve been this audacious before. Every month, in fact. So this seems a right believable thing for me to do.”

“I’m not letting you in. Not this time. You are a scoundrel.”

Wayne sighed. Heroes in stories never had to fight the same beast twice. Seemed unfair he had to face this one each month. “Look, I just want to check in on her.”

“She is fine.”

“I have money,” Wayne said. “To give her.”

“You can leave it here. You distress the girl, miscreant.”

Wayne stepped forward, taking the tyrant by the shoulder. “I didn’t want to have to do this.”

She looked at him. And, to his surprise, she cracked her knuckles. *Wow.* He reached into his pocket quickly and pulled out a piece of pasteboard.

“One ticket,” Wayne said quickly, “admitting two people to the governor’s spring dinner and policy speech, occurring during a party at Lady ZoBell’s penthouse tonight. This here ticket lists no specific names. Anyone who has it can get in.”

Her eyes widened. “Who’d you steal that from?”

“Please,” Wayne said. “It came delivered to my house.”

Which was perfectly true. It was for Wax and Steris. But they were important enough folk that invitations sent to them had no names, so they could send an emissary if they wished. When it came to someone fancy like Wax, even getting their relative or friend to attend your party could be advantageous.

The tyrant didn’t count as either. But Wayne figured that Wax would be happy to not have to go to the blasted party anyway. Besides, Wayne had left a real nice-looking leaf he’d found in exchange. Rusting beautiful, that leaf was.

The tyrant hesitated, so Wayne waved the ticket in front of her.

“I guess…” she said. “I could let you in one last time. I’m not supposed to allow unrelated men into the visiting room, however.”

“I’m practically family,” he said. They made a big fuss about keeping the young women and young men separated around here, which Wayne found odd. With all of these smart people around, wouldn’t one of them have realized what boys and girls was supposed to do together?

The tyrant let him pass into the visiting room, then sent one of the girls at the desk to run for Allriandre. Wayne sat down, but couldn’t keep his feet from tapping. He’d been stripped of weapons, bribes, and even his own hat. He was practically naked, but he’d made it to the final test.

Allriandre entered a few moments later. She’d brought backup with her in the form of two other young ladies about her age—just shy of twenty. *Smart girl,* Wayne thought, proud. He rose.

“Madam Penfor says you’re drunk,” Allriandre said, remaining in the doorway.

Wayne tapped his metalmind, drawing forth healing. In a moment, his body burned away its impurities and healed its wounds. It thought alcohol was a poison, which showed that a fellow couldn’t always trust his own body, but today he didn’t complain. It also washed away his sniffles for the moment, though those would return. It was hard to heal from diseases with a metalmind for some reason.

Either way, sobriety hit him like a brick to the chin. He inhaled deeply, feeling even more naked than before. “I just like to play with her,” Wayne said, all hint of slur gone from his voice, eyes focused.

Allriandre studied him intently, then nodded. She did not enter the room.

“I brought this month’s money,” Wayne said, taking an envelope out and setting it on the low, glass-topped table beside him. He stood up straight, then shuffled from one foot to the other.

“Is that really him?” one of the girls asked Allriandre. “They say he rides with Dawnshot. Of the Roughs.”

“It’s him,” Allriandre said, eyes still on Wayne. “I don’t want your money.”

“Your mama told me to bring it to you,” Wayne said.

“You don’t need to bring it in person.”

“I do,” Wayne said quietly.

They stood in silence, neither party moving. Wayne finally cleared his throat. “How’re your studies? Are you treated well here? Is there anythin’ you need?”

Allriandre reached into her handbag and took out a large locket. She spread it open, displaying a strikingly distinct evanotype of a man with a wide mustache and a twinkle in his eyes. He had a long, friendly face, and his hair was thinning on top. Her father.

She made Wayne look at it every time.

“Tell me what you did,” she said. That voice. It could have been the voice of winter itself.

“I don’t—”

“Tell me.”

The third trial.

“I killed your daddy,” Wayne said softly, looking at the picture. “I mugged him in an alley for his pocketbook. I shot a better man than me, and because of that, I don’t deserve to be alive.”

“You know you aren’t forgiven.”

“I know.”

“You will never be forgiven.”

“I know.”

“Then I’ll take your blood money,” Allriandre said. “If you care to know, my studies go well. I am thinking of taking up the law.”

Someday, he hoped he might be able to look into the girl’s eyes and see emotion. Hatred, maybe. Something other than that emptiness.

“Get out.”

Wayne ducked his head and left.

* * *

There should not have been a thatched log hut in the middle of Elendel, and yet here it was. Wax stooped to enter, seeming to step backward in time hundreds of years. The air inside smelled of old leather and furs.

The enormous firepit in the middle would never be needed in Elendel’s mild weather. Today, a smaller fire had been constructed at its very center, and over it simmered a small kettle of hot water for tea. However, charred stones indicated that the entire firepit was sometimes used. It, the furs, the ancient-style paintings on the wall—of winds, and frozen rain, and tiny figures painted with simple strokes on slopes—were all fragments of a myth.

Old Terris. A legendary land of snow and ice, with white-furred beasts and spirits that haunted frozen storms. During the early days following the Catacendre, refugees from Terris had written down memories of their homeland, as no Keepers had remained.

Wax settled down beside his grandmother’s firepit. Some said that Old Terris waited for this people, hidden somewhere in this new world of Harmony’s design. To the faithful, it might as well have been paradise; a frozen, hostile paradise. Living in a land naturally lush with bounteous fruit, where little cultivation was required, could warp one’s vision.

Grandmother V settled down opposite him, but did not start the fire. “Did you remove your guns before entering the Village this time?”

“I did not.”

She snorted. “So insolent. During your long absence, I often wondered if the Roughs might temper you.”

“They made me more stubborn, is all.”

“A land of heat and death,” Grandmother V said. She crinkled a handful of herbs, flakes dropping into a tea strainer above her cup. She poured steaming water over them, then placed the lid with a gnarled hand. “Everything about you stinks of death, Asinthew.”

“That isn’t what my father named me.”

"Your father didn't have the right. I would demand you remove the weapons, but it would be meaningless. You could kill with a coin, or with a button, or with this pot."

"Allomancy is not so evil as you make it out to be, Grandmother."

"Neither power is evil," she said. "It is mixing those powers that is dangerous. Your nature is not your fault, but I cannot help but see it as a sign. Another tyrant in our future, too powerful. It leads to death."

Sitting in this hut … the scent of Grandmother's tea … Memories grabbed Wax by his collar and shoved him face-first up against his past. A young man who had never been able to decide what he was. Allomancer or Feruchemist, city lord or humble Terrisman? His father and uncle pushing him one way, his grandmother another.

"A Feruchemist slaughtered people in the Fourth Octant last night, Grandmother," Wax said. "He was a Steelrunner. I know you track everyone in the city with Feruchemical blood. I need a list of names."

Grandmother V swished around her tea. "You've visited the Village on … what, a mere three occasions since your return to the city? Nearly two years, and you've made time for your grandmother only twice before today."

"Can you blame me, considering how these meetings usually go? To be blunt, Grandmother, I know how you feel about me. So why torture either of us?"

"You cling to your images of me from two decades ago, child. People change. Even one such as I." She sipped her tea, then added more herbs to the strainer and lowered it back into the water. She would not drink until it was right. "Not one such as you, it appears."

"Trying to bait me, Grandmother?"

"No. I am better at insults than that. You haven't changed. You still don't know who you are."

An old argument. She'd said it to him both times they'd met during the last two years. "I am *not* going to start wearing Terris robes, speaking softly, quoting proverbs at people."

"You will shoot them instead."

Wax took a deep breath. A mixture of scents lingered in the air. From the tea? Scents like that of freshly cut grass. His father's estates, sitting on the lawn, listening to his father and grandmother argue.

Wax had lived here in the Village for only a single year. It had been all his father had agreed to give. Even that had been surprising; Uncle Edwarn had wanted Wax and his sister to both stay away from the place. Before his official heir, the late Hinston Ladrian, had been born when Wax was eighteen, Edwarn had basically appropriated his brother's children and tried to raise them. Even still, it was hard to separate Wax's parents' will in his head from that of Edwarn.

One year among these trees. Wax had been forbidden Allomancy during his days in the Village, but had learned something far greater. That criminals existed, even among the idyllic Terris.

"The only times I've truly known who I am," Wax said, looking up at his grandmother, meeting her eyes, "are when I've put on the mistcoat, strapped guns to my waist, and hunted down men gone rabid."

"You should not be defined by what you do, but by what you are."

"A man is what he does."

"You came looking for a Feruchemist killer? You need only look in the mirror, child. If a man is what he does … think of what you've done."

"I've never killed a man who didn't deserve it."

"Can you be *absolutely* certain of that?"

"Reasonably. If I've made mistakes, I'll pay for them someday. You won't distract me, Grandmother. To fight is not against the Terris way. Harmony killed."

"He slew beasts and monsters only. Never our own."

Wax breathed out. This again? *Rusts. I should have* forced *Wayne to come here instead of me. He says she actually likes him.*

A new scent struck him. Crushed blossoms. In the darkness of that chamber, he imagined himself again, standing among the trees of the Terris Village. Looking up at a broken window, and feeling the bullet in his hand.

And he smiled. Once that memory had brought him pain—the pain of isolation. Now he saw only a budding lawman, remembered the sense of *purpose* he'd felt.

Wax stood up, grabbing his hat, mistcoat rustling. He almost wanted to believe that the scents to the room, the memories, were his grandmother's doing. Who knew what she put into that tea?

"I'm going to hunt down a murderer," Wax said. "If I do it without your help, and he kills again before I can stop him, you will be partially to blame. See how well you sleep at night then, Grandmother."

"Will you kill him?" she asked. "Will you shoot for the chest when you could aim for the leg? People die around you. Do not deny it."

“I don’t,” he said. “A man should never pull a trigger unless he’s willing to kill. And if the other fellow is armed, I’m going to aim for the chest. That way, when people do die around me, it’s the right ones.”

Grandmother V stared at her teapot. “The one you’re looking for is named Idashwy. And she is not a man.”

“Steelrunner?”

“Yes. She is not a killer.”

“But—”

“She is the only Steelrunner I know of who could possibly be involved in something like this. She vanished about a month ago after acting … very erratically. Claimed that she was being visited by the spirit of her dead brother.”

“Idashwy,” he said. It was pronounced in the Terris manner, eye-dash-wee. The syllables felt thick in his mouth, another reminder of his days in the Village. The Terris language had been dead once, but Harmony’s records included it, and many Terris now learned to speak it in their youths. “I swear I know that name.”

“You did know her, long ago,” Grandmother V said. “You were with her that night, actually, before…”

Ah yes. Slender, golden hair, shy and didn’t speak much. *I didn’t know she was a Feruchemist.*

“You don’t even have the decency to look ashamed,” Grandmother V said.

“I’m not,” Wax said. “Hate me if you must, Grandmother, but coming to live with you changed my life, just as you always promised it would. I’m not going to be ashamed that the transformation wasn’t the one you expected.”

“Just … try to bring her back, Asinthew. She’s not a killer. She’s confused.”

“They all are,” Wax said, stepping out of the hut. The three men from before stood outside, glaring at him with displeasure. Wax tipped his hat to them, dropped a coin, then launched himself into the air between two trees, passing their canopies and seeking the sky.

* * *

Each time Marasi entered the precinct offices, she got a little thrill.

It was the thrill of bucked expectations, of a future denied. Even though this room didn’t look like she’d imagined—as the clerical and organizational center for the octant’s constables, it felt more like a business office than anything else—the mere fact that she was here excited her.

This wasn’t supposed to have been her life. She’d grown up reading stories of the Roughs, of lawmen and villains. She’d dreamed of six-guns and stagecoaches. She’d even taken up horseback riding and rifle shooting. And then, real life had intervened.

She’d been born into privilege. Yes, she was illegitimate, but the generous stipend from her father had set her and her mother up in a fine home. Money for an education had been guaranteed for her. With that kind of promise—and with her mother’s determination that Marasi should enter society and prove herself to her father—one did not choose a profession so lowly as that of a constable.

Yet here she was. It was wonderful.

She passed through the room full of people at desks. Though a jail was attached to the building, it had its own entrance, and she rarely visited it. Many of the constables she passed on her way through the main chamber were the type who spent most of their days at a desk. Her own spot was a comfortable nook near Captain Aradel’s office. His room felt like a closet inside, and Aradel rarely spent time there. Instead, he stalked through the main chamber like a prowling lion, always in motion.

Marasi set her handbag on her desk next to a stack of last year’s crime reports—in her spare time, she was trying to judge to what extent petty crimes in a region foretold greater ones. Better that than reading the politely angry letters from her mother, which lay underneath. She peeked into the captain’s office and found his waistcoat thrown across his desk, right beside the pile of expense reports he was supposed to be initialing. She smiled and shook her head, dug his pocket watch out of his waistcoat, then went hunting.

The offices were busy, but they didn’t have the bustle of the prosecutor’s offices. During her internship there beneath Daius, everyone had always seemed so *frantic*. People worked all hours, and when a new case was posted, every junior solicitor in the room rushed over in a flurry of papers, coats, and skirts, craning to see who had posted the case and how many assistants they would be taking.

The opportunities for prestige, and even wealth, had been bountiful. And yet she hadn’t been able to shake the feeling that nobody was actually *doing* anything. Cases that could make a difference languished because they weren’t high-profile enough, while anything under the patronage of a prominent lord or lady was seen to immediately. The rush had been less about fixing the city’s problems, and more about making certain the senior solicitors saw how much more eager you were than your colleagues.

She’d probably still be there, if she hadn’t met Waxillium. She’d have done as her mother wanted, seeking validation through her child. Proof, perhaps, that she *could* have married Lord Harms, if it had been in the cards, despite her low birth. Marasi shook her head. She loved her mother, but the woman simply had too much time on her hands.

The constables’ offices were so different from the solicitors’. Here, there was a true sense of purpose, but it was measured, even thoughtful. Constables leaned back in chairs and described evidence to other officers, looking for help on a case. Junior corporals moved through the room, delivering cups of tea, fetching files, or running some other errand. The competition she’d felt among the solicitors barely existed here. Perhaps that was because there was little prestige, and even less wealth, to go around.

She found Aradel with sleeves rolled up, one foot on a chair, bothering Lieutenant Caberel. “No, no,” Aradel said. “I’m telling you, we need more men on the streets. Near the pubs, at nights, where the foundry workers congregate after the strike line breaks up. Don’t bother guarding them during the day.”

Caberel nodded placidly, though she gave Marasi a roll of the eyes as she walked up. Aradel *did* tend to micromanage, but at least he was earnest. In Marasi’s experience, they were almost all fond of him, eyerolls notwithstanding.

She plucked a cup of tea off the plate of a passing corporal, who was delivering them to the desks. He quickly moved on, eyes forward, but she could almost feel him glaring at her. Well, it wasn’t *her* fault she’d landed this position, and the rank of lieutenant, without ever having to deliver tea.

All right, she admitted to herself, sipping the tea and stepping up beside Aradel. *Maybe there is a* bit *of competition around here.*

“You’ll see this done, then?” Aradel asked.

“Of course, sir,” Caberel said. She was one of the few in the place who treated Marasi with any measure of respect. Perhaps it was because they were both women.

There were fewer women in the constabulary than among the solicitors. One might have guessed that the reason for this was that ladies weren’t interested in the violence—but having done both jobs, Marasi felt she knew which profession was bloodier. And it wasn't the one where people carried guns.

"Good, good," Aradel said. "I have a debriefing with Captain Reddi in…" He patted at his pocket.

Marasi held out his watch, which he grabbed and checked for the time.

"… fifteen minutes. Huh. More time than I expected. Where'd you get that tea, Colms?"

"Want me to have someone fetch you some?" she asked.

"No, no. I can do it." He bustled off, and Marasi nodded to Caberel, then hurried after him.

"Sir," she said, "have you seen the afternoon broadsheets?"

He held out his hand, which she filled with paper. He held up the stack of broadsheets, and almost ran over three different constables on his way to the stove and the tea. "Bad," he muttered. "I'd hoped they'd spin this against us."

"Us, sir?" Marasi asked, surprised.

"Sure," he said. "Nobleman dead, constables not giving the press details. This reads like they started to pin the death on the constables, but then changed their minds. By the end, the tone is far more outraged against Winsting than us."

"And that's worse than outrage at *us* for a cover-up?"

"Far worse, Lieutenant," he said with a grimace, reaching for a cup. "People are used to hating conners. We're a magnet for it, a lightning rod. Better us than the governor."

"Unless the governor deserves it, sir."

"Dangerous words, Lieutenant," Aradel said, filling his cup with steaming tea from the large urn kept warm atop the coal stove. "And likely inappropriate."

"You know there are rumors that he's corrupt," Marasi said softly.

"What I *know* is that we are civil servants," Aradel said. "There are enough people out there with the mindset and the moral position to monitor the government. *Our* job is to keep the peace."

Marasi frowned, but said nothing. Governor Innate *was* corrupt, she was almost sure of it. There were too many coincidences, too many small oddities in his policy decisions. It wasn't by any means obvious, but trends were Marasi's specialty, and her passion.

It wasn’t as if she’d wanted to discover that the leader of Elendel was trading favors with the city’s elite, but once she’d spotted the signs, she’d felt compelled to dig in. On her desk, carefully hidden under a stack of ordinary reports, was a ledger in which she’d assembled all the information. Nothing concrete, but the picture it drew was clear to her—even though she understood that it would look innocent to anyone else.

Aradel studied her. “You disagree with my opinion, Lieutenant?”

“One doesn’t change the world by avoiding the hard questions, sir.”

“Feel free to ask them, then. In your head, Lieutenant, and not out loud—particularly not to people outside the precinct. We can’t have the men we work for thinking we are trying to undermine them.”

“Funny, sir,” Marasi said. “I thought we worked for the people of the city, not their leaders.”

Aradel stopped, cup of steaming tea halfway to his lips. “Suppose I deserved that,” he said, then took a gulp, shaking his head. He didn’t flinch at the heat. People in the office figured he’d seared his taste buds off years ago. “Let’s go.”

They wove through the room toward Aradel’s office, passing Captain Reddi at his desk. The lanky man rose, but Aradel waved him down, pulling out his watch. “I still have … five minutes until I have to deal with you, Reddi.”

Marasi shot the captain an apologetic smile. She got a scowl in return.

“Someday,” she noted, “I’m going to figure out why that man hates me.”

“Hmmm?” Aradel said. “Oh, you stole his job.”

Marasi missed a step, stumbling into Lieutenant Ahlstrom’s desk. “What?” she demanded, hurrying after Aradel. “Sir?”

“Reddi was going to be my assistant,” Aradel said as they reached his office. “Had a damn fine bid for the job; I was all but priced into hiring him, until I got your application.”

Marasi blushed deeply. “Why would *Reddi* want to be your assistant, sir? He’s a field constable, a senior detective.”

“Everyone has this idea that in order to move up, you need to spend more time in the office and less on the street,” Aradel said. “Stupid tradition, even if the other octants follow it. I don’t want my best men and women turning into desk slugs. I want the assistant position to be for nurturing someone fresh who shows promise, rather than letting some practiced constable gather moss.”

The realization made a lot of things lock into place for Marasi. The hostility she felt from many of the others wasn't just because she'd skipped the lower ranks—many with noble titles did that. It was because they'd solidified behind Reddi, their friend who'd been slighted.

"So…" Marasi said, taking a deep breath and grasping for something to keep her from a panic. "You think I show promise then?"

"Of course I do. Why would I have hired you otherwise?" Corporal Maindew walked by, saluting, and Aradel threw the wadded broadsheets into his face. "No saluting indoors, Maindew. You'll knock yourself unconscious slapping your forehead every time I walk past." He glanced back at Marasi as Maindew mumbled an apology and rushed off.

"There's something in *you*, Colms," Aradel told her. "Not the gloss and glint of the application. I don't care about your grades, or what those zinctongues in the solicitors' office thought of you. The words you wrote about changing the city, those made sense. They impressed me."

"I … Thank you for the praise, sir."

"I'm not flattering you, Colms. It's just a fact." He pointed toward the door. "That broadsheet said the governor was going to address the city later this afternoon. I'll bet the Second Octant constables ask us for help managing the crowds; they always do. So I'm going to send a street detail. Go with them and listen, then report back to me what Governor Innate says, and pay attention to how the crowd reacts."

"Yes, sir," Marasi said, stopping herself from saluting as she snatched her handbag and ran to follow the orders.

THE HOUS

Market Opening

EBSE stocks +0.5
Commodities -2.1

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“GENTLEMAN JAK IN THE CITY OF FOUNTAINS”

Part Six

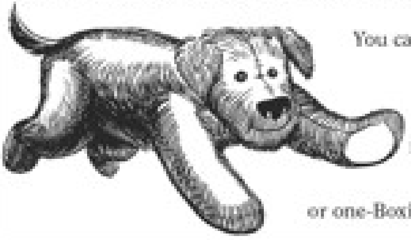
“The Sinister Soiree!”

I need not remind my astute readers of the precarious situation in which I was left at the end of last week's column, but for those of you whose heightened tastes have just now led them from the gutters of disgraceful journalism to the noble pages of The House Record, let me present a short recapitulation.

Through the efforts alone of my silver tongue and tin-quick mind, I gained access to Lady Lavont's private party in New Seran wherein she planned to auction the only remaining buttons from the Lord Mistborn's favorite smoking jacket. Handerwym, my faithful Terrisman steward, had prised the information that the leader of the Cobblesguilders planned to steal the buttons by swapping them with impeccable forgeries at some point during the night.

As Handerwym watched the tin buttons from the hors d'oeuvres table, I rubbed elbows with Lady Lavont, and her inner circle, who found me completely enchanting. That was when the man in the striped white suit pointed a gun at me. *(Continued Below!)*

ALL Children Love SOONIE PUPS



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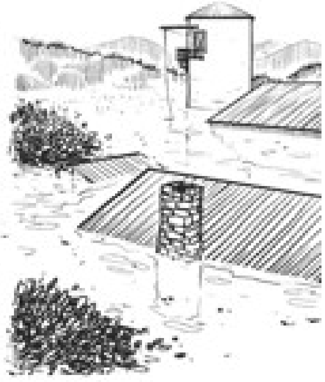
ELENDEL FEELS E
OF CORBEAU FLO

Higher commodities prices to impact marl



As one of the Basin's key grain-producing regions struggles to rebuild following the breaking of the dam near Corbeau, unanswered questions still threaten the comfort of those at the heart of the Basin. The Argien-Ohr Financial Circle, Elendel's largest and most prestigious committee of bankers and other financial leaders, has called an emergency meeting to discuss sending aid to the flood-ravaged area. The biggest question haunting the Circle is if the investment of boxings and resources will be enough to affect the commodities markets, which are just now beginning to founder under the predictions of grain harvests half as large as last year's.

“There are enough supplies in reserve to meet most demands over the next four months,” says Lord Chapmot Heviers, a Circle member with strong ties to Corbeau. “But after that, most grain will start going to the highest bidder. If you own bakeries, you will think twice about selling loaves at five clips each when you could be selling whiskey at forty clips a bottle.”

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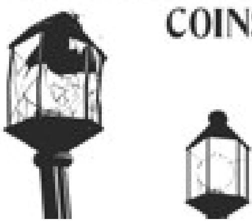
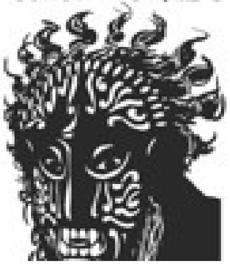
GUEST EDITORIAL:
THE NUISANCE OF NEGLIGENT COINSHOTS!



In the last sixteen months I have replaced three lamposts, an iron gate, and two steeple spires, all at my Madion Ways house. My residence in the 6th Octant, much nearer the Hub, has needed twice that

VISITORS from other WORLDS



The Sinister Soiree!

I described my assailant as wearing a striped white suit, but that is not as specific as it may seem. In Elendel, someone dressed as described would stick out like afternoon tea among koloss,

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ELENDEL FEELS EFFECTS OF CORBEAU FLOODING

Higher commodities prices to impact market performance

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6

Wax soared through the air above Elendel, hat held by its strings to his neck, mistcoat waving behind him like a banner. Below, the city bustled and moved, people swarming through its roadway arteries. Some glanced at him, but most ignored him. Allomancers were not the rarity here they had been in the Roughs.

All these people, Wax thought, Pushing off a fountain shaped like mists condensing into Harmony with arms upraised, bracers glittering golden on the otherwise green copper statue. Women sat on its stone edge; children played in its waters. Motorcars and horse carriages broke around it, sweeping to the sides and charging down other roads, going about the ever-important business of city life.

So many people—and here, in the Fourth Octant, a frightening percentage of them were his responsibility. To begin with he paid their wages, or oversaw those who did; on the solvency of his house rested the financial stability of thousands upon thousands. But that was only part of it; because through his seat in the Senate, he represented any who worked for him, or who lived on properties he owned.

Two divisions within the Senate. One side, the representatives of the professions, was elected and came and went as people's needs changed. The other side, the seats of the noble houses, was stable and immutable—not subject to the whims of voters. The governor, elected by the seats, presided over them all.

A good enough system, except it meant that Wax was supposed to look after tens of thousands of individuals he could never know. His eye twitched, and he turned, Pushing off some rebar sloppily left sticking from a tenement wall.

Towns were better in the Roughs, where you could know everyone. That way you could care for them, and really *feel* you were doing something. Marasi would argue that statistically, leading his house here was more effective in creating general human happiness, but he wasn't a man of numbers; he was a man who trusted his gut. His gut missed knowing the people he served.

Wax landed on a large water tower near a glass dome covering his octant's largest Church of the Survivor. People were worshipping inside, though a greater number would come at dusk to await the mists. The Church revered the mists, and yet with that glass dome they still separated themselves from it. Wax shook his head, then Pushed off along the nearby canal.

He's probably finished by now, Wax thought. *He'll be on one of the nearby docks, listening to the lapping water.…*

He continued along the canal, which was cluttered with boats. Tindwyl Promenade, which ran along this canal, was crowded—even more so than usual. Dense with life. It was difficult not to feel subsumed by the great city, engulfed, overwhelmed, insignificant. Out in the Roughs Wax hadn't just enforced the law; he had interpreted it, revised it when needed. He had *been* the law.

Here he had to dance around egos and secrets.

As Wax searched for the right dock, he was surprised to eventually find the reason for the traffic on the promenade. It was all bunched up, trying to get through a large clot of men with signs. Wax passed overhead, and was shocked to see a small cluster of constables from the local octant amid the picketers—they were being pressed on all sides by the shouting men, waving signs in an uncomfortably violent manner.

Wax dropped through the air and Pushed lightly on the nails in the promenade boards here, slowing his descent. He landed in a crouch in an opening nearby, mistcoat flaring, guns clinking.

The picketers regarded him for a long moment, then broke apart, taking off in different directions. He didn’t even have to say a word. In moments the beleaguered constables emerged, like stones on the plain as the soil washed away in a sudden rain.

“Thanks, sir,” said their captain, an older woman whose blonde hair poked down straight about an inch on all sides around her constable’s hat.

“They’re getting violent?” Wax asked, watching the last of the picketers vanish.

“Didn’t like us trying to move them off the promenade, Dawnshot,” the woman said. She shivered. “Didn’t expect it to go so bad, so fast.…”

“Can’t say I blame them much,” one of the other constables said, a fellow with a neck like a long-barreled pistol. His fellows turned to him, and he hunched down. “Look, you can’t say you don’t have mates among them. You can’t say you haven’t heard them grumble. Something needs to change in this city. That’s all I’m saying.”

“They don’t have the right to block a main thoroughfare,” Wax said, “no matter their grievances. Report back to your precinct, and make sure you bring more men next time.”

They nodded, hiking off. The promenade’s knot of pedestrians slowly unwound itself, and Wax shook his head, worried. The men running the strikes *did* have a grievance. He’d found some of the same problematic conditions among the few factories he owned—long hours, dangerous environments—and had been forced to fire a few overseers because of it. He’d replaced them with overseers who instead would hire more men, for shorter shifts, as there was no shortage of laborers in the city who were out of work these days. But then he’d needed to up wages, so that the men could live on the shorter-shift income—making his goods more costly. Difficult times. And he didn’t have the answers, not to those problems.

He hiked along the promenade a short distance, drawing more than a few stares from people he passed. But he soon found what he’d been looking for. Wayne sat on a narrow dock nearby. He had his shoes and socks off, feet in the water, and was staring off down the canal. “Hello, Wax,” he said without looking as Wax stepped up.

“It went poorly?” Wax asked.

“Same as always. It’s strange. Most days I don’t mind being me. Today I do.”

Wax crouched down, resting a hand on the younger man’s shoulder.

“Do you ever wonder if you shoulda just shot me?” Wayne asked. “Back when you and Jon first found me?”

“I’m not in the habit of shooting people who can’t shoot back,” Wax said.

“I coulda been faking.”

“No. You couldn’t have been.”

Wayne had been a youth of sixteen when Wax and Jon Deadfinger—a lawman who had been mentoring Wax—had found him curled up in the crawl space under a house, hands over his ears, cloaked in dirt and whimpers. Wayne had thrown his guns and ammunition down a well. Even as Deadfinger had dragged him out, Wayne had been complaining of the gunfire. Shots only he could hear, echoing from that well.…

“Any number of the boys we run across and take down,” Wayne said. “Any of them could be like me. Why did I get a second chance, but none of them do?”

“Luck.”

Wayne turned to meet his eyes.

“I’d give those lads second chances if I could,” Wax said. “Maybe they’ve had their moments of doubt, regret. But the ones we shoot, we don’t find them unarmed, hiding, willing to be brought in. We find them killing. And if I’d found you in the process of armed robbery all those years ago, I’d have shot you too.”

“You’re not lying, are you?”

“Of course not. I’d have shot you right in the head, Wayne.”

“You’re a good friend,” Wayne said. “Thanks, Wax.”

“You’re the only person I know that I can cheer up by promising to kill him.”

“You didn’t promise to kill me,” Wayne said, pulling on his socks. “You promised to have killed me. That there be the present perfect tense.”

“Your grasp of the language is startling,” Wax said, “considering how you so frequently brutalize it.”

“Ain’t nobody what knows the cow better than the butcher, Wax.”

“I suppose…” Wax said, standing up. “Have you ever met a woman named Idashwy? A Feruchemist.”

“Steelrunner?”

Wax nodded.

“Never met her,” Wayne said. “They keep kicking me out of the Village when I visit. Right unneighborly.”

So far as Wax knew, that wasn’t true. Wayne would occasionally toss on some Terris robes, mimic their accents, then sneak in to live among them for a few days. He’d eventually get into trouble for saying something crude to one of the young women, but he wouldn’t get thrown out. He’d baffle them, as he did most people, until he got bored and wandered away.

“Let’s see what we can find,” Wax said, waving down a canal gondola.

* * *

“Five notes, for *one basket* of apples! That’s robbery!”

Marasi hesitated on the street. She’d driven the motorcar up to the Hub for the governor’s speech, then parked it with the coachmen who took pay to watch and refuel motors, intending to walk the rest of the way on foot. The Hub could be a busy place.

That led her here, near this small street market with people selling fruit. With disbelief, she saw that one vendor was—indeed—selling apples at *five notes* a basket. Those shouldn’t cost more than half a boxing per basket, at most. She’d seen them for a handful of clips.

“I could get these at Elend’s stand for a fraction of the price!” the customer said.

“Well, why don’t you go see if he has any left?” the cart owner said, nonplussed. The customer stormed off, leaving the cart owner with her sign proudly proclaiming the ridiculous price. Marasi frowned, then glanced down the row of stands, barrels, and carts.

Suspiciously low quantities, all ’round. She walked up to the cart owner with the high prices; the woman stood up stiffly, braids shaking, and shoved her hands into the pockets of her apron. “Officer,” she said.

“Five is on the high side, wouldn’t you say?” Marasi asked, picking up an apple. “Unless these are infused with atium.”

“Am I doing anything wrong?” the woman asked.

“You have the right to set your prices,” Marasi said. “One simply wonders what you seem to know that nobody else does.”

The woman didn’t respond.

“Shipment coming late?” Marasi asked. “Apple harvest gone bad?”

The woman sighed. “Not apples, officer. Grain shipments out of the east. Simply not coming. Floods did them in.”

“A little early to be speculating on food prices, don’t you think?”

“Pardon, officer, but do you know how much food this city eats? We’re one shipment away from starvation, we are.”

Marasi glanced down the row again. Food was moving quickly, most of it—from what she could see—being sold to the same group of people. Speculators grabbing up the fruits and sacks of grain. The city wasn’t as close to starvation as the cart owner claimed—there were storages that could be released—but bad news moved faster than calm winds. And there was a good chance this woman was right, that she’d be able to sell her apples at a premium until things calmed down in a few days.

Marasi shook her head, setting down the apple and continuing toward the Hub. There was always a press here, people on the promenade, vehicles on the streets trying to force their way into the ring around the Hub. More people today, crowds drawn by the speech causing traffic clots in the regular bustle. Marasi could barely make out the giant statues of the Ascendant Warrior and her husband in the Field of Rebirth peeking out over the throng.

Marasi walked up to join another group of constables who had just arrived, on Aradel’s orders, their carriages lagging behind her motorcar. Together they wended their way through the streets on foot toward the executive mansion. The governor preferred to address people from its steps, a few streets up into the Second Octant from the Hub.

They soon reached the large square before the mansion. Moving here was more difficult, but fortunately the constables from this octant were already in attendance—and they had roped off various areas near the front and sides of the square. In one, dignitaries and noblemen sat on bleachers to hear the address. In another, the Second Octant constables clustered and watched the crowd for pickpockets from the steps up into the National Archives. Other constables moved through the crowd, officers readily identifiable by the blue plumes on their hats.

Marasi and Lieutenant Javies, who had command of the field team, made their way toward the National Archives, where their colleagues from the Second Octant let them pass. A mustachioed older constable was directing things here, his helm—under his arm—bearing the double plume of a captain. When he saw Marasi, Javies, and the team, the man lit up.

“Ah, so Aradel sent me reinforcements after all,” he exclaimed. “Rusting wonderful. You chaps go watch the east side of the square, down Longard Street. Foundry workers are gathering there, and they don’t look too pleasant. This isn't the place for their picket lines, I dare say. Maybe an eyeful of constable uniforms will keep them in check."

"Sir," Javies said, saluting. "Those masses are pushing up against the steps to the mansion! With respect, sir, don't you want us up there?"

"Governor's guards have jurisdiction, Lieutenant," the old captain said. "They brush us back if we try to do anything on the actual mansion grounds. Damn pewternecked bulls. They barely give us warning anytime the governor wants to have a say to the people, then expect us to do the hard work of policing this mess."

Javies saluted, and his team ran off.

"Sir," Marasi said, remaining behind. "Constable-General Aradel wanted me to bring him a direct report on the speech. Do you think I could get a spot on those bleachers to watch?"

"No luck there," the captain said. "Every niece and nanny of a house lord has demanded a spot; they'll gut me if I send someone else over."

"Thank you anyway, sir. I'll see if I can work my way to the front of the crowd." Marasi moved off.

"Wait, constable," the old man said. "Don't I know you?"

She looked back, blushing. "I'm—"

"Lord Harms's girl!" the old captain said. "The bastard. That's it! Now, don't get red-faced. That's not meant as an insult, child. Just what you are, and that's it, simple as day. I like your father. He was bad enough at cards to be fun to play against, but he was careful not to bet so much that I felt bad winning."

"Sir." News of her nature, once kept discreet, had moved through all of high society. Hanging around Waxillium, who created such stirs, did have its drawbacks. And her mother *did* have something of a reason for her angry letters.

Marasi was quite accepting of what she was. That didn't mean she liked having it thrown at her. Old nobleman officers like this, though … well, they came from a time when they felt they could say whatever they wanted, particularly about their subordinates.

"There's space with the reporters, Little Harms," he said, pointing. "Up near the north side. Not great for watching, as you'll have steps in your way, but a great place for listening. Tell Constable Wells at the rope I said you could pass, and give my best to your father."

She saluted, still wrestling with a mixture of shame and indignation. He didn’t mean anything by his comments. But Rust and Ruin, she had worked most of her life swept under the rug with a few coins in hand, her father refusing to openly acknowledge her. Among the constables at least, couldn’t she be known for her professional accomplishments, not the nature of her birth?

Still, she wouldn’t turn down the opportunity for a better spot, so she began to work her way around the square toward the section he’d specified.

* * *

What was that? Wax thought. He spun to look away from the group of beggars he’d been questioning.

“Wax?” Wayne called, turning away from another group of people. “What —”

Wax ignored him, shoving through a crowd on the street toward the thing he’d seen. A face.

It can’t be.

His frantic actions drew annoyed shouts from some people, but only dark glares from others. The days when a nobleman, even an Allomancer, could quell with a look were passing. Wax eventually stumbled into a pocket of open ground and spun about. *Where?* Wild, every sense straining, he dropped a bullet casing and Pushed, instantly popping up about ten feet. Scanning, he whirled, the motion flaring his mistcoat tassels.

The heavy flow of people on Tindwyl Promenade continued toward the Hub, near which the governor would apparently be making a speech. *That’s a dangerous crowd,* a piece of him noticed. There were too many men wearing battered coats and bearing battered expressions. The labor issue was becoming a bigger and bigger problem. Half the city was underpaid and overworked. The other half was simply out of work. A strange dichotomy.

He kept seeing men loitering on corners. Now they flowed together in streams. That would create dangerous rapids, as when a real river met rocks. Wax landed, heart thrumming like the drum of a march. He’d been sure of it, this time. He *had* seen Bloody Tan in that crowd of men. A brief glimpse of a familiar face, the mortician killer, the last man Wax had hunted in the Roughs before coming to Elendel.

The man who had caused Lessie’s death.

“Wax?” Wayne hurried up. “Wax, you all right? You look like you ate an egg you found in the gutter.”

“It’s nothing,” Wax said.

“Ah,” Wayne said. “Then that look I saw … you were just contemplatin’ your impendin’ marriage to Steris, I guess?”

Wax sighed, turning away from the crowds. *I imagined it. I must have imagined it.* “I wish you’d leave Steris alone. She’s not nearly so bad as you make her sound.”

“That’s the same thing you said about that horse you bought—you remember, the one who only bit *me*?”

“Roseweather had good taste. Did you find anything?”

Wayne nodded, leading them out of the press of traffic. “Miss Steelrunner settled down nearby, all right,” he said. “She got a job doing bookkeeping for a jeweler down the road. She hasn’t come in to work in over a week though. The jeweler sent someone to her flat, but nobody answered the door.”

“You got the address?” Wax asked.

“Of course I did.” Wayne looked offended, shoving his hands in the pockets of his duster. “Got me a new pocket watch too.” He held up one made of pure gold, with opaline workings on the face.

Wax sighed. After a short trip back to the jeweler to return the watch—Wayne claimed he figured it had been for trade, since it had been sitting out on the counter with naught but a little box of glass around it—they made their way up the road to the Bournton District.

This was a high-quality neighborhood, which also meant it had less character. No laundry airing in front of buildings, no people sitting on the steps. Instead the street was lined by white townhouses and rows of apartment buildings with spiky iron decorations around their upper windows. They checked the address with one of the local newsboys, and eventually found themselves in front of the apartment building in question.

“Someday I’d like to live in a fancy place like this,” Wayne said wistfully.

“Wayne, you live in a mansion.”

“It ain’t fancy. It’s *opulent*. Big difference.”

“Which is?”

“Mostly it involves which kinds of glasses you drink out of and what kind of art you hang.” Wayne looked offended. “You need to know these things now, Wax, being filthy rich and all.”

“Wayne, you’re practically rich yourself, after the reward from the Vanishers case.”

Wayne shrugged. He hadn’t touched his share of that, which had been paid out mostly in aluminum recovered from Miles and his gang. Wax led the way up the steps running along the outside of the building. Idashwy’s place was at the top, a small apartment on the rear, with a view only of the back of other buildings. Wax slipped Vindication out of her holster, then knocked, standing to the side of the door in case someone shot through it.

No response.

“Nice door,” Wayne said softly. “Good wood.” He kicked it open.

Wax leveled his gun and Wayne ducked inside, sliding up against the wall to avoid being backlit. He found a switch a moment later, turning on the room’s electric lights.

Wax raised the gun beside his head, pointing at the ceiling, and swept in. The apartment wasn’t much to look at. The pile of folded blankets in the corner probably served as a bed. With steelsight, Wax saw no moving bits of metal. Everything was still and calm.

Wax peeked into the bathroom while Wayne moved over to the only other room in the apartment, a kitchen. Indoor plumbing for the bathroom, electric lights. This *was* a fancy place. Most Terris claimed to prefer simple lives. What had led her to pay for something like this?

“Aw, hell,” Wayne said from the kitchen. “That ain’t no fun.”

Wax moved over, gun out, and glanced around the corner into the kitchen. It was just large enough for one person to lie down in. He knew this because of the bloody corpse stretched out on the floor, her chest bearing a large hole in the center, eyes staring sightlessly into the air.

“Looks like we’re going to need a new prime suspect, Wax,” Wayne said. “This one downright refuses to not be dead already.”

* * *

Marasi’s position at the speech turned out to be exactly as advertised: nestled into a narrow gap in the crowd formed by the side steps of the mansion’s forecourt. Around her, the members of the press clutched pencils and pads, ready to jot down bite-sized quotes from the governor’s speech that might make good headlines. Marasi was the only constable among them, and her lieutenant’s bars didn’t earn her much consideration from the reporters.

Their view was obstructed not only by the position of the wide stone steps, but also by the governor's guard—a row of men and women in dark suits and hats, standing with hands clasped behind their backs along the steps. Only a pair of sketch artists, who stood at one corner of the knot of reporters, had anything resembling a good view of the governor's platform, which had been erected on the steps.

That was fine with Marasi. She didn't need to see much of Innate to digest and relate his words. Besides, this position gave her an excellent view of the gathering crowd, which she found more interesting. Dirty men stained with soot from work in the factories. Tired women who—because of the advent of electricity—could now be forced to work much longer hours, well into the night, with the threat of dismissal to keep them at the loom. Yet there was hope in those eyes. Hope that the governor would have encouragement to offer, a promised end to the city's growing strain.

Mirabell's Rules, Marasi thought, nodding to herself. Mirabell had been a statistician and psychologist in the third century who had studied why some people worked harder than others. Turned out a man or woman was much more likely to do good work if they were invested—if they felt ownership of what they did and could see that it mattered. Her personal studies proved that crime went down when people had a sense of identity with and ownership of their community.

That was the problem, because modern society was eroding those concepts. Life seemed more transient now, with people commonly relocating and changing jobs during their lifetime—things that had almost never happened a century ago. Progress had forced it upon them. These days, Elendel just didn't need as many carriage drivers as it did automobile repairmen.

You had to adapt. Move. Change. That was good, but it could also threaten identity, connection, and sense of purpose. The governor's guards studied the crowd with hostility, muttering about miscreants, as if seeing the crowd as barely contained malefactors who were looking for any excuse to riot and loot.

To the contrary, these people wanted something stable, something that would let them sustain their communities or forge new ones. Rioting was rarely caused by greed, but frequently by frustration and hopelessness.

The governor finally made his appearance, stepping from the mansion. Marasi caught a few fragmentary glimpses of him between the legs of the guards. Innate was a tall, handsome man, unlike his brother, who had always seemed dumpy to Marasi. Clean-shaven, with a wave in his salt-and-pepper hair and a trendy set of spectacles, Innate was the first governor to pose for his official portrait wearing spectacles.

Would he know? Would he understand how to calm these people? He was corrupt, but it was a quiet kind of corruption—little favors done to enrich himself or his friends. It was quite possible he did care for the people of his city, even while enriching himself. He stepped up to his platform, where a diminutive woman in a green dress skittered around, adjusting devices that looked like big cones with their wide openings facing the crowd. Marasi felt she should recognize the young woman—who was barely more than a girl, with long blonde hair and a lean face. Where *had* Marasi seen her before?

She thought for a moment, then sidled up to one of the reporters to read over her shoulder. *"Breezy day" … blah blah … "air of violent suspense," whatever that means … There! "Attended by the curious ministrations of Miss Sophi Tarcsel, the inventor's daughter."*

Sophi Tarcsel. She'd been making an uproar, writing opinion pieces in the broadsheets about her father, who had supposedly been a great inventor—though Marasi had never heard or read his name before those articles.

"People of Elendel," Governor Innate said, and Marasi was surprised by how his voice echoed across the square, loud and clear. Something to do with those devices, apparently. "The papers would have you believe that this evening we stand on the brink of a crisis, but I assure you, no such problem exists. My brother was not the criminal they are condemning him to have been."

Oh, Innate, Marasi thought, sighing to herself as she wrote. *That's not why they're here.* Nobody had come to hear more about Winsting. What about the city's real problems?

"I will not suffer this defamation of my dear brother's character," Innate continued. "He was a good man, a statesman and philanthropist. You might have forgotten the Hub beautification project that he spearheaded just three years ago, but I have not.…"

He continued in that vein. Marasi dutifully took notes for Captain Aradel, but she shook her head. Innate's goal was understandable. He hoped to preserve his family's reputation in the eyes of important investors and noblemen, and perhaps deflate some of the public anger. It wouldn't work.

The people didn’t *actually* care about Winsting. It was the deeper corruption, the feeling of powerlessness, that was destroying this city.

As the speech progressed, laboring with explanations of how good a man Winsting had been, Marasi edged to the side in an attempt to get a better view. How was Innate responding to the crowd? He was charismatic; she could hear that even from the way he spoke. Maybe he *was* doing some good with his oratory alone, even if the speech lacked substance.

“A full investigation of the constables will be ordered,” Innate continued. “I am not convinced my brother was killed as they say. My sources posit this might all be the result of a bungled raid, using my brother as willing bait to catch criminals. If that is true, and they put my brother in harm’s way and are now covering it up, the responsible parties will answer for it.”

Marasi moved to the side, but her view was obstructed by one of the guards, who stepped in front of her. Annoyed, Marasi moved again, and again the guardsman moved. She’d have considered it deliberate if his back hadn’t been to her.

“As for the floods in the east, we are sending relief. Your friends and relatives there shall be succored. We stand with them in the face of this disaster.”

Not good, she noted. *The people don’t want to hear about aid going outside the city, no matter how necessary, not while things are growing worse and worse here.…* Marasi moved again. Aradel wanted her to judge the public’s reaction, but she needed a better view.

Her shuffling earned a curse of annoyance from one of the reporters, and she finally got a sight of Innate on his podium. He moved into a longer rant against the press. Perhaps that was why the reporter had been so testy. She certainly would be.…

Marasi frowned. That guardsman who had been moving and shuffling and blocking her view had turned, and she could see a *very* odd expression on his face, like a grimace of pain. And he was whispering—at least his mouth was moving. Nobody else seemed to notice him, as they were focused on the speech.

So Marasi was the first one to scream as the guardsman pulled a revolver from underneath his coat and leveled it at the governor.

* * *

Wayne prowled around the dead woman’s room. It was too clean. A room where people lived should have a healthy amount of clutter. Miss Steelrunner hadn’t spent much time here.

In the other room, Wax inspected the body. Wayne left him to that; he had no interest in poking at a corpse’s insides, even if Wax claimed it was important. Wayne, instead, went looking for more interesting bits of life. His first discovery was a small cache of bottles in the cabinet under the bathroom washbasin. Various forms of alcohol, the harder stuff, each a little gone. All save one, which was empty. Wayne gave it a sniff. Port.

Not surprising, he thought. He took the whiskey and gave it a good swig. Bleh. Too much bite, and far too warm. He took another swig as he spun about in the main room. These fancy neighborhoods were too quiet. People should be shouting outside. That was *right* for the city. He checked the trunk beside her sleeping pallet and found it contained three outfits, each clean and carefully folded. The Terris robes were on the bottom. Creases had set; these weren’t worn often. The other two were modern designs, the one on top more daring than the one below.

He took another swig of whiskey and wandered back into the room with the corpse. Wax had removed his hat and coat, and knelt beside the body in his vest and slacks.

“You found the alcohol, I see,” Wax said. “How uncharacteristic.”

Wayne grinned, offering the bottle to Wax, who took a small swig. “Ugh,” he noted, handing it back. “This murder is troubling, Wayne.”

“I’m sure she felt so.”

“Too many questions. Why did she leave the Village, and why choose to live here? It doesn’t feel very Terris.”

“Oh, I can tell you why she was here,” Wayne said.

“Well?”

“Think of yourself as a sheltered Terriswoman in her forties,” Wayne said. “Old enough to have missed the chance to be a wild youth, and starting to wish you’d done something more daring.”

“The Terris don’t long for wildness,” Wax said, taking notes in a little book as he inspected the woman’s wound. “They aren’t daring. They’re a reserved people.”

“Ain’t we Terris?”

“We’re exceptions.”

"Everyone's an exception to something, Wax. This girl, she left the Village and found a whole world out here. She must have had an adventurous side."

Whiskey.

"She did," Wax admitted. "I didn't know her well, but she'd sneak out of the Village as a youth. That was long ago."

"And she left again," Wayne said, "on account of the Village being so dull as to bore the sense out of a scribe. Hell, even *Steris* would hate that place."

"Wayne…"

"Our miss," Wayne said, waving the bottle toward the dead woman, "she tried to remain conservative at first, so she got a job as a clerk, a good Terris occupation. She convinced herself that a nice apartment—where she was safe from the supposed horrors of lesser neighborhoods—was worth the expense. Simple stuff.

"But then some workers at the jeweler took her out, and she let herself drink. She liked that. Awakened memories of sneaked drinks as a youth. She wanted more, so she bought a whole *mess* of different kinds of spirits to try them all out. She liked port best, by the way."

"Makes sense," Wax said.

"Now we find her with increasingly liberal dresses, showing more skin, spending most evenings out. Give her a few more months, and she'd have turned into a right proper girl to have a good time with."

Whiskey.

"She didn't get a few more months," Wax said softly. He took something from his own pocket and handed it out to Wayne. A book, bound in leather, pocket-sized. "Have a look through this."

Wayne took it, flipping through some pages. "What is it?"

"The book that Death gave me."

* * *

Marasi's shout was lost in the roar as the governor ended his speech. Polite applause from the nobility, shouts and curses from most of the workers. The noise swallowed her shout like a single splash in a breaking tide.

She fumbled for her handbag as the guard in the dark coat sighted with his gun at the governor. No. There wasn't time for her gun. She had to do something else.

She jumped for the man and slowed time.

She had metal in her this time—she’d made sure, after being embarrassed this morning. Her Allomancy created a bubble of greatly slowed-down time, enveloping herself, the would-be assassin, and a few bystanders.

She grabbed the man around the legs, but her speed bubble did the real work, trapping him inside—as everyone *outside* became a blur. The man squeezed his gun’s trigger, and the crack of a gunshot rang amid the strange warping of sounds that she heard inside a bubble from those outside. One of his fellow guards, also caught in her bubble, shouted in alarm.

The fired bullet hit the perimeter of the speed bubble and was deflected. It shot out over the blur of the crowd, the governor’s figure vanishing as—she assumed—he was rushed away. Marasi’s lunge wasn’t enough to topple the would-be assassin, and so she lay there half on the steps, holding on to his legs and feeling foolish, until one of his companions hit him harder, knocking him down.

She dropped the speed bubble and jumped back, the sudden roar of the crowd washing over her. The captured man struggled, shouting, as other guards piled onto him.

* * *

“So basically, with this … Hemalurgy,” Wax said, “you can *make* someone Metalborn.”

Wayne sniffled as he flipped through the book, and his cheeks were breaking out in some kind of rash. *Storing health,* Wax thought. Wayne often ended up with odd rashes when he did that. They sat in the main room of Idashwy’s apartment, away from the corpse, which they’d draped with a sheet. They’d paused briefly in their inspection to send the newsboy for the local constables.

Wax ground his teeth. Idashwy’s wound … it was just like those described in the book. Somebody had killed this woman with a spike through the chest, stealing her Feruchemical talent. The book described the process as “tearing off a chunk of someone’s soul.” Using the spike, one could effectively *attach* that piece of soul to one’s own, granting the powers of the deceased.

In the old days, Inquisitors had driven the spike right through the body of the one to be killed into the body of the person to gain the powers. That prevented any power from being lost. Apparently, coating the newly made spike in blood could achieve a similar effect.

He knew, Wax thought. *Ironeyes knew something like this was going to come.* The book had been written by the Lord Mistborn long ago to leave some record of the art known as Hemalurgy. Lestibournes's book said he considered it a crime that the Words of Founding—Harmony's own record—omitted references to the dark art.

"So our killer knows this Hemalurgy stuff?" Wayne said.

"Yes," Wax said. "The killer used a spike to steal Idashwy's Feruchemical talent, then employed that ability to kill Lord Winsting and his guests. We have to assume that our killer could also have numerous other powers at their disposal: any combination of Allomantic or Feruchemical abilities. Or all of them."

Wayne whistled softly.

"Did you discover anything else in your search of the room?" Wax asked.

"Not much."

"I understand the motive here," Wax said, glancing back toward the kitchen with the body. "But I don't yet have one for Winsting's murder. Or … well, I know of too *many* possibilities. I don't have the right motive."

"What did you find in the stiff's pockets?"

Wax hesitated.

"You didn't rifle through the pockets?" Wayne asked, aghast. "Wax, you're a *terrible* grave robber!"

"I was distracted by the manner of death," Wax said, rising. "I'd have gotten to it."

The word "distracted" didn't really do justice to his emotions—to the profound shock, the numbness. For months that book had been only an object of study, but now its contents had abruptly ceased being mere words on a page and had become a motive for murder.

We're out of our depth, Wax thought, returning to the kitchen. *We've crept into the realm of the gods. Harmony, Ironeyes, the Lord Mistborn …*

Wayne pulled back the sheet, exposing that gaping hole in the woman's chest—right at the sternum. Who would know how to do something like this? Who would Harmony *let* know how to do something like this?

"Here," Wayne said, fishing in the woman's skirt pockets. He came out with a folded-up piece of paper. He unfolded it, then grunted. "Huh. It's for you."

Wax's stomach plummeted. Wayne slowly turned the paper around. It was a sheet ripped from a ledger, filled with numbers and sums. Scrawled across it in a different hand was a single sentence—a familiar sentence. The very words Bloody Tan had said before jerking Lessie right into the path of Wax's bullet, making him kill the woman he loved.

Someone else moves us, lawman.

7

“Look, Wax,” Wayne said as the two of them entered Ladrian Mansion, “I saw Tan’s body. You shot him square in the head. That bloke was deader than a stuffed lion in a hunting lodge. It ain’t him.”

“What if he was secretly Metalborn?” Wax asked. “Miles could have survived a shot to the head.”

“Doesn’t work that way, mate,” Wayne said, shutting the door and tossing his coat at Darriance. It hit the butler in the face. “If you’re a Bloodmaker, you’ve got to heal a head wound *right as* it’s happening. Once a bloke is actually dead, no power—Allomantic or Feruchemical—is bringin’ ’im back.”

“I *saw* him, Wayne. Twice.” *Once while chasing the Marksman, and then just earlier today.*

“Master,” Darriance said, folding Wayne’s coat. “New equipment has arrived for you from Miss Ranette. She asked if you’d be willing to test it.”

“Aw, Ruin!” Wayne said. “I missed her? What did she leave for me?”

“She … said I was to slap you,” Darriance admitted.

“Aw. She does care. See that, Wax, she cares!”

Wax nodded absently as Wayne tried to force Darriance to slap him across the rear—which he doubted was what Ranette had intended.

“Sir,” Darriance said, turning away from Wayne’s proffered posterior. “In addition to the package, Lady Harms awaits you in the sitting room.”

Wax hesitated, impatient to go upstairs. He needed time to think—preferably with his earring in—and to go through Ranette’s package. They were always very interesting.

But he couldn’t simply ignore Steris. “Thank you, Darriance,” Wax said. “Send a note to my grandmother at the Village that says we found the missing Terriswoman, but someone had gotten to her—and regretfully killed her—before we arrived. Say the constables will explain the rest, and may have questions for her.”

“Very well, my lord.”

Wax pushed his way into the sitting room. Steris rose to greet him, and Wax kissed her hand. “I don’t have a lot of time, Steris.”

“You’ve sunk your teeth in, then,” she said, eyeing him up and down. “I suppose this could be useful. If you catch the murderer of the governor’s brother, it will be politically favorable.”

“Unless I drag some corpses out into the light.”

“Well, perhaps we can prepare for that,” she said. “Lady ZoBell’s party. You are still planning to attend with me?”

Rusts. He’d forgotten all about it.

“Our invitation has gone missing—I suspect Wayne is to blame—but it doesn’t matter. You’re lord of a Great House. They won’t turn us away.”

“Steris. I don’t know if I have the time…”

“The governor is attending,” Steris said. “You could speak with him about his brother.”

More meaningless conversation, Wax thought. *More dances and political games.* He needed to be working, hunting.

Bloody Tan. His eye twitched.

“There was some talk of the governor not attending,” Steris said, “considering what happened today. However, I have it on the best authority that he *will* come. He doesn’t want to appear to have anything to hide in these parlous times.”

Wax frowned. “Wait. What happened today?”

“Assassination attempt on the governor,” Steris said. “You really don’t know?”

“I’ve been busy. Rusts! Someone tried to kill him? Who?”

“Some deranged man,” Steris said. “Not in his right mind. They caught him, I’m told.”

“I’ll need to talk to the suspect,” Wax said, walking for the door. “It might be connected.”

“He wasn’t a credible threat,” Steris said. “By all reports, the man’s aim was terrible. He didn’t come close to hitting his intended victim. Waxillium?”

“Wayne!” Wax said, shoving open the door. “We’ve got—”

“On it already,” Wayne said, holding up a broadsheet from the table. Evening edition; Wax had a subscription. The top line read, “Bold Attack on the Governor in Daylight!” Wayne tossed Wax his hat off the rack, then snapped his fingers toward the butler—who was in the process of hanging Wayne’s duster in the coat closet. Darriance sighed, getting it back out and carrying it over.

“I’ll try to make the party,” Wax said to Steris, pulling his hat on. “If I’m not back, feel free to go without me.”

Steris folded her arms. “Oh? I suppose I should take the butler instead, then?”

“If you like.”

“Be careful about that, Steris,” Wayne added. “Wax’s butlers have a tendency to explode.”

Wax gave him a glare, and the two of them charged out the door toward the coach.

“You still need private time for that thinkin’ of yours?” Wayne asked.

“Yes.”

“Never touch the stuff myself,” Wayne said. “Causes headaches. Hey, Hoid. Can I catch a ride up there with you?”

The new coachman shrugged, making room for Wayne on top of the carriage. Wayne climbed up, and Wax stepped inside. This wouldn’t be ideal, but it would have to do. He pulled down the window shades, then settled back as the coach began rolling.

He took his earring out of his pocket—the earring of the Pathian religion. His was special. He’d been hand-delivered it under mysterious circumstances. Lately, though, he had avoided wearing it, as the book made clear what it must be. Long ago, a small spike of metal like this had allowed people to communicate with Ruin and Preservation, gods of the ancient world. It was Hemalurgy.

Had this earring, then, been made by killing someone?

Hesitantly, he slipped it in.

Unfortunately, a voice said in his mind, *your fears about the earring are correct. It is a Hemalurgic spike.*

Wax jumped, throwing open the carriage door with Allomancy—preparing his escape—while pulling out Vindication. Rusts! He'd heard that voice as if someone were sitting beside him.

Firing that gun would not have the effect you want, I think, the voice said. *Even if you could see me, shooting at me would merely ruin the furnishings of your coach, costing precisely eighty-four boxings to repair when Miss Grimes takes it to the shop next week. You'd be left with a new wood panel on the coach body just behind me which would never quite match those around it.*

Wax breathed in and out. "Harmony."

Yes? the voice said.

"You're here, in my coach."

Technically, I am everywhere.

Wax trembled, mouth going dry. He forced himself to close the door and sit back down.

Tell me, the voice said in his head, *what were you expecting to happen when you put in the earring, if not this?*

"I…" Wax slid Vindication back into her holster. "I wasn't expecting an answer so … promptly. And my reflexes tend to be on the jumpy side lately. Um, Your Deificness."

You may call me Harmony, or "Lord" if you must. The voice sounded amused. *Now. About what do you wish to speak?*

"You know."

Better to hear you say it.

"Better for You to hear me say it," Wax said, "or for me to hear myself say it?"

Both.

"Am I insane?" Wax asked.

If you were, speaking to a figment of your delusion would certainly not diagnose that fact.

"You're not helping much."

Then ask better questions, Waxillium.

Wax leaned forward. "I…" He clasped his hands before him. "You're real."

You've heard my voice; you've followed my Path.

"A few whispered words when I was in a moment of great stress, when I was gravely wounded," Wax said. "Words I've doubted ever since. This is different. This is … more real."

You need to hear it then, do you? the voice said. It sounded as clear and ordinary as if someone normal, someone *visible*, sat there talking to him. *Very well. I am Harmony, the Hero of Ages, once called Sazed. At the end of one world, I took upon myself the powers of protection and destruction, and in so doing became the caretaker of the world to come. I am here, Waxillium, to tell you that you are* not *insane.*

"Bloody Tan lives."

Not exactly.

Wax frowned.

There are … beings in this world who are neither human nor koloss. Something related to both. You call them the Faceless Immortals.

"Kandra," Wax said. "Like TenSoon, the Guardian. Or the person who gave me this earring."

They can take the corpses of the dead and use their bones to mimic a person who has died—they wear bodies like you wear clothing, changing back and forth as they wish. They were created by the Lord Ruler using Hemalurgy.

"Your Holy Books give few details about their organization," Wax said. "But everyone knows that the Faceless Immortals are *your* servants. Not murderers."

Any being has choice, Harmony said. *Even koloss have the power to choose. This one … the being who wears Bloody Tan's body … has not made very good choices.*

"Who is he?"

She is a member of the Third Generation, and you should know better than to assume everyone dangerous to be a male. Paalm was what we called her, but she has chosen the name Bleeder for herself. Waxillium, Bleeder is ancient, older than the destruction of the world—almost as old as the Final Empire. Indeed, she is even older than I am, though not older than my *powers. She is crafty, careful, and brilliant. And I'm afraid that she might have gone mad.*

The carriage turned a corner.

"One of Your ancient servants," Wax said, "has gone mad and is killing people."

Yes.

"So stop her!"

It is not so simple.

"Free will?" Wax said, annoyed.

No, not in this case. I can directly control a being who has pierced herself with too much Hemalurgy. In this case I would act, for Bleeder has disobeyed her Contract with me and opened herself up for my intervention. Something is wrong, unfortunately.

"What?" Wax asked.

God was silent for a time. *I don't know yet.*

Wax felt cold. "Is that possible?"

It appears so. Somehow, Bleeder has figured out how to hide from me. At times I can spot her, but only when she takes direct and obvious action.

Unfortunately, she has removed one of her Blessings—one of the two spikes that kandra must keep inside themselves to retain their cognition. I would forcibly control her if I could, but one spike does not pierce the soul sufficiently for me to get in.

"Cognition," Wax said. "Two spikes are required for the kandra to be able to think. But she is going around with only one. Which means…?"

Insanity, Harmony said, His voice softer in Wax's ear. *But something is wrong beyond that. She can hide from me, and while I can speak to her, she doesn't have to listen—and I can't keep track of where she is.*

"Didn't you say you were everywhere?"

My essence is, Harmony said. *But this thing that I am … it is more complex than you might expect.*

"Being God is more complex than a mortal can comprehend?" Wax said. "What a surprise."

Harmony chuckled softly.

Wait, Wax thought. *Did I just get sarcastic with God Himself?*

Yes, you did, Harmony said. *It is well. Few act that way toward me, even among the kandra. It feels good to me. Like older times. Since Kelsier … well, I haven't had much of that.*

“You can hear my thoughts?” Wax asked.

When you have the earring in, yes. I gain the ability to hear you from Preservation, and the ability to speak to you from Ruin. Each had only one half. I always found it puzzling.

Regardless, I know you have been reading young Lestibournes’s book. I am not pleased that he made it, but I could not forbid him. I will trust that Marsh was wise in giving it to you. Bleeder can use Hemalurgy, but in a way she should not be able to. Kandra do not have Allomantic or Feruchemical powers. She has learned to take these, and to use them to maintain her kandra form.

Fortunately, she is limited. She can only use one spike at a time, otherwise she will open herself to my control. If she trades spikes, she must do it by ripping out her single one and then falling onto another, digesting it and returning her to sapience.

I do not know her game with this city, but I’m alarmed by it. She has spent centuries studying human behavior. She is planning something.

“I’ll have to stop her, then.”

I will send you help.

“I assume, considering the source, it will be spectacular.”

Harmony sighed softly. In Wax’s mind’s eye, he had a sudden image of a being standing with hands clasped behind Him, eternity extending into darkness before Him. Tall, robed, back to Wax, almost visible and distinct yet somehow completely unknowable at the same time.

Waxillium, Harmony said, *I have tried to explain this to you, but I did not do a good job, I think. My hands are tied, and I am bounded.*

“Who ties God’s hands?”

I tied them myself.

Wax frowned.

I hold both Ruin and Preservation, Harmony said. *The danger in carrying these opposed powers is that I can see both sides—the need for life, the need for death. I am balance. And, to an extent, I am neutrality.*

“But Bleeder used to be one of Your own, and now she’s acting against You.”

She used to be of Preservation. She has moved to being of Ruin. Both are needed.

“Murderers are needed,” Wax said flatly.

Yes. No. The potential for murderers is needed. Waxillium, I—the personality you speak to—agree with your indignation. But the powers that I am, *the essence of my self, cannot allow me to take sides.*

Already I fear that I have made things too easy for men. This city, the perfect climate, the ground that renews … You were to have had the radio a century ago, but you didn't need it, so you didn't strive for it. You ignore aviation, and cannot tame the wilds because you don't care to study proper irrigation or fertilization.

"The … radio? What is that?"

You don't explore, Harmony continued, ignoring Wax's confusion. *Why would you? You have everything you want here. You've barely progressed technologically from what I gave you in the books. Yet others, who were nearly destroyed …*

I made a mistake with you, I now see. I still make many. Does that ruin your faith, Waxillium? Does it worry you that your God is fallible?

"You never claimed to be infallible, so far as I remember."

No. I did not.

Wax felt a warmth, a fire, as if the inside of the carriage were heating to incredible temperatures.

I loathe suffering, Waxillium. I hate that people like Bleeder must be allowed to do what they do. I cannot stop them. You can. I beg you to do so.

"I will try."

Good. Oh, and Waxillium?

"Yes, Lord?"

Do be less harsh with Marasi Colms. You aren't my only agent in the affairs of men; I worked quite hard to maneuver Marasi into a position where she could do good in this city. It is taxing to have you continue to dismiss her because her admiration makes you uncomfortable.

Wax swallowed. "Yes, Lord."

I will send you help.

The voice vanished. The temperature returned to normal. Wax leaned back, sweating, feeling drained.

A rapping came at his window. Hesitant, Wax pulled aside the shade. Wayne's face hung there, upside down, his hand holding his hat onto his head. "You done talking to yourself, Wax?" he asked.

"I … Yes, I am."

"I heard voices in my head once too, you know."

“You did?”

“Sure. Gave me a fright. I banged my head against the wall until I went unconscious. Never heard *them* again! Ha. Showed ’em good, I did. If rats move in, best thing to do is to burn the nest and send ’em packing.”

“And the nest … was your head.”

“Yup.”

The sad thing was, Wayne probably wasn’t lying. Being unkillable, so long as one had some healing power stored up, could do strange things to a person’s sense of self-preservation. Of course, Wayne had probably been drunk at the time. That *also* tended to do strange things to a person’s sense of self-preservation.

“Well, anyway,” Wayne said. “We’re almost to the precinct headquarters. Time to go back to being dirty conners. At least they’ll probably have scones inside.”

* * *

Marasi stood in the precinct station with arms folded, partially to hide the fact that her hands were still trembling. That was unfair. She’d been in firefights numerous times now. She should be accustomed to this … but still, after the jolt of it all wore off—the moment of thrill and action—she occasionally found herself feeling drained. Surely she’d get past it eventually.

“He was wearing these, sir,” Reddi said, placing a pair of bracers onto the table with a thump. “No other metal on his body save for the gun and a pocketful of rounds. We’ve called in the First Octant precinct’s Leecher to make sure he doesn’t have any metal swallowed, but we can’t be certain until she arrives.”

Aradel picked up one of the bracers, turning it over in his hands. The dim room was a kind of balcony, overlooking the interrogation chamber below, where the assassin Marasi had stopped sat slumped in a chair. His name was Rian; no house, though they’d located his family. He was tied with ropes to a large stone behind his chair. No metal in the room, to make it safe to stow Coinshots or Lurchers. Stone floor, walls made of thick wood joined with wooden pegs. Almost primitive in feel. The balcony had glass walls, letting them look down upon him without being heard.

“So he’s Metalborn,” said Lieutenant Caberel, the only other person in the room. The stout woman picked up the other bracer. “Why didn’t he use his abilities in the assassination? If he killed Winsting with Feruchemical speed, like old Waxillium Dawnshot says, he should have done the same today."

"Maybe he didn't kill Winsting," Aradel said. "The attacks could be unrelated."

"He fits the profile though, sir," Reddi said. "Winsting's bodyguards probably would have trusted a member of the governor's personal guard. He could have talked his way past them and done the deed."

"Hard to imagine Winsting's guards letting even someone like that in alone with their charge, Captain," Aradel said. "After a firefight where others were being killed? They'd be tense. Suspicious."

Down below, the suspect began rocking back and forth on his seat. The vents that would allow them to listen in on him were closed, but she had a sense that he was muttering to himself again.

"So, we just ask him," Caberel said.

"Again?" Reddi said. "You heard before. All he does is mumble."

"Then encourage him," Caberel said. "You're pretty good at that, Reddi."

"I suppose his face could use a few new bruises," Reddi said.

"You know you can't do that," Marasi said from beside the window.

Reddi looked at her. "Don't quote statistics at me, Colms. I've found I can make a man speak the truth, no matter what you claim."

"It isn't statistics this time," Marasi said. "If you actively torture that man, you'll ruin him for prosecution. His attorneys will get him off for sure."

Reddi gave her a scowl.

"So send for his daughter," Caberel said, glancing over the fact sheet they had on the man. "We threaten her in front of him, but don't do anything to harm her. He'll talk."

Marasi rubbed her forehead. "That's *specifically* illegal, Caberel. Do you people know nothing about Article Eighty-Nine? He has rights."

"He's a criminal," Reddi said.

"He's a suspected criminal." Marasi sighed. "You can't continue to act as you have in the past, Reddi. New laws are in place. They're only going to get stricter, and the defense attorneys are increasingly clever."

"The solicitors have sold out to the other side," Caberel said with a nod. "She's right."

Marasi remained silent on that score. Of course it wasn't really a matter of selling out at all—but she'd settle for the constables learning to follow the rules, regardless of the reasoning.

“I think,” Reddi said, “that it’s unfortunate we’ve got someone among us who seems to be more on the solicitors’ side than on the side of justice. She knows more about their ways than ours.”

“Perhaps she does,” Aradel said in a soft, stern voice. “And one might consider that to be exactly why I brought her in among us, Captain Reddi. Colms knows contemporary legal codes. If you paid more attention to the very laws you are sworn to uphold, perhaps Daughnin wouldn’t have gotten back on the street last month.”

Reddi blushed, bowing his head. Aradel stepped up beside Marasi, looking down at the captive. “How are you at interrogating hostile witnesses, Lieutenant?”

“Less practiced than I’d like to be,” she replied with a grimace. “I’m willing to give it a try, but we might as well wait for a few more minutes.”

“Why?”

Distantly, a door slammed. “That’s why,” Marasi said.

A moment later, the door into their observation chamber was flung open, Pushed by Waxillium as he approached. Couldn’t the man be bothered to lift a hand from time to time? He strode in, tailed by Wayne, who was for some reason wearing Constable Terri’s hat.

Waxillium looked down at the captive. He narrowed his eyes, then glanced at the bracers on the table nearby. One jumped, then fell off the table, Pushed by his unseen Allomantic ability.

He grunted. “Those aren’t metalminds,” he said. “This man is a decoy. You’ve been duped.” He turned as if to leave. Wayne slouched down in one of the chairs and put his feet up beside the bracers, then promptly started snoring.

“Wait, that’s *it*?” Reddi said, glancing at Waxillium. “You aren’t even going to interrogate him?”

“I’ll talk to him,” Waxillium said. “He might give us clues that will help find Winsting’s killer. But it wasn’t that man.”

“How can you be so sure, Waxillium?” Marasi said.

“It takes more effort to Push on real metalminds,” Waxillium said, pointing. “And that man is too obvious. Whoever did this has predicted our conjecture that one of Innate’s guards was behind the murder, and wants us to jump on this man as a suspect. They want us to assume we have the killer in custody. Why, though? Are they planning something tonight…?”

Distracted, he walked toward the door. “I’m going to go talk to the prisoner. Marasi, I wouldn’t mind another set of ears.”

She started. He was *asking* her for help? That was a change from making her feel guilty every time she showed up at a crime scene. She glanced at Aradel, who gave her leave, and she hurried after Waxillium.

In the stairwell down, Waxillium stopped and turned toward her. He was wearing his Roughs hat. He only did that when he was in full-on “tough lawman” mode. “I hear you brought this guy in.”

“I did.”

“Nice work.”

That should *not* have given her the thrill that it did. She didn’t need his approval.

It was nice nonetheless.

He continued to study her, as if on the verge of saying something more.

“What?” Marasi asked.

“I spoke to God on the way over here.”

“All right…” Marasi said. “I’m glad you’re devout enough to say a prayer now and then.”

“Yes. Thing is, He spoke back.”

She cocked her head, trying to judge the meaning of that. But Waxillium Ladrian was nothing if not earnest. Rusts, often he was too blunt.

“All right,” she said. “What did he tell you?”

“Our killer is a Faceless Immortal,” Waxillium said, starting down the steps again. “A creature who calls herself Bleeder. She can change shapes by taking the bones of the dead, and she’s been driven mad. Even Harmony doesn’t know her purposes.”

Marasi followed him down, trying to swallow that. Mistwraiths and kandra … those were things out of the Historica, not real life. Then again, once she would have said that men like Miles Hundredlives and Waxillium Dawnshot were men out of stories. They’d lived up to the legends to a surprising degree.

“So that *could* be her,” Marasi said, gesturing toward the wall separating them from the prisoner. “She could have any shape, any face! Why are you so sure this isn’t the killer?”

“Because the governor is still alive,” Waxillium said softly. “The creature who’s behind this casually murdered Winsting in a saferoom, behind a wall of guards, after intentionally starting a firefight in the room above. She wouldn't be caught like this. It's a taunt." He looked to Marasi. "But I can't be certain, not a hundred percent. So I need you to know what we're up against."

She nodded to him and he nodded back, then he led the way out of the stairwell and around the corner toward the interrogation room. Marasi took a bit of satisfaction in the fact that the corporal there looked to her for authorization before opening the door for Waxillium.

The poor captive inside sat with his arms tied tight, staring at the table in front of him. He muttered softly. Waxillium walked straight up to the table and took the other seat, settling down and putting his hat on the table. Marasi lingered back, where—in case they were wrong about the prisoner—she'd be out of reach but able to offer aid.

Waxillium tapped the table with his index finger, as if trying to decide what to say. The prisoner, Rian, finally looked up.

"She said you'd come talk to me," Rian said softly.

"She?" Waxillium said.

"God."

"Harmony?"

"No. She said I had to kill the governor. Had to attack him. I tried not to listen.…"

Waxillium narrowed his eyes. "You met her? What did she look like? What face was she wearing?"

"You can't save him," Rian whispered. "She's going to kill him. She promised me freedom, but here I am, bound. Oh, Ruin." He took a deep breath. "There is something for you. In my arm."

"In your…" Waxillium actually seemed disturbed. Marasi took an unconscious step forward, noticing for the first time a small bulge in the prisoner's forearm.

Before she could quote the legal problems with doing so, Waxillium stood up and took that arm, making a quick slice in the skin. He pulled something out, bloody. A coin? Marasi stepped forward again as the prisoner reached to his head with his bleeding arm and started humming to himself.

Waxillium wiped off the coin with his handkerchief. He inspected it, then turned it over. Then he grew very still, paling. He stood up suddenly. "Where did you get this?" he demanded.

Rian only continued humming.

“Where?” Waxillium demanded, grabbing the man by the front of the shirt.

“Waxillium,” Marasi said, running up, hand on his arm. “Stop.”

He looked to her, then dropped Rian.

“What is that coin?” Marasi asked.

“A message,” Waxillium said, shoving the coin in his pocket. “This man won’t know anything of use. Bleeder knew we might capture him. Do you have plans for tonight?”

She frowned. “What … why are you asking?”

“Governor’s attending a party. Steris says he won’t cancel despite what has happened, and this is the sort of thing she’s always right about. He’ll want to put up a strong front, and won’t want his political enemies to think he has anything to either hide or fear. We need to be at that party. Because I guarantee Bleeder will be.”

8

Young Waxillium, age twelve, looked from one coin to the other. Both bore a picture of the Lord Mistborn on the front, standing with his left arm outspread toward the Elendel Basin. On the back, each displayed a picture of the First Central Bank, in which his family owned a large stake.

“Well?” Edwarn asked. He had a stern face and perfect hair. He wore his suit like he’d been born in it—and to him it was a uniform of war.

“I…” The youthful Waxillium looked from one to the other.

“It is understandable you can’t spot the difference,” Edwarn said. “It takes an expert, which is why so few of these have been discovered. More may actually be in circulation; we can’t know how many. One of those is an ordinary coin; the other has a very special defect.”

The carriage continued rattling through the streets as Waxillium studied the coins. Then he unfocused his eyes. It was a trick he’d been taught by a friend at a party recently, used for making two drawings spring to life by overlapping them.

Eyes unfocused, coins before him, he crossed his eyes intentionally and let the images of the two coins overlap one another. When they locked into place, the element of the picture that wasn't the same—one of the pillars on the bank building—fuzzed as his eyes were unable to focus on that point.

"The mistake happened," Uncle Edwarn continued, "because a defective coin striker was used. One worker at the mint brought home a pocketful of these curiosities, which were never supposed to enter circulation. You won't be able to see it, but the error—"

"It's the pillars," Waxillium said. "On the right side of the bank picture. They are spaced too closely."

"Yes. How did you know that? Who told you?"

"I saw it," Waxillium said, handing the coins back.

"Nonsense," Uncle Edwarn said. "Your lie is not a believable one, but I can respect your attempt at hiding your source." He held up one of the coins. "This is the most valuable defective coin in Elendel history. It's worth as much as a small house. Studying it taught me something important."

"That rich people are foolish? They'll pay more money for a coin than it's worth?"

"All people are foolish, just in different ways," Uncle Edwarn said offhandedly. "That lesson I learned elsewhere. No, this coin showed me a harsh but invaluable truth. Money is meaningless."

Waxillium perked up. "What?"

"Only expectation has value as currency, Waxillium," Uncle Edwarn said. "This coin is worth more than the others because people *think* it is. They *expect* it to be. The most important things in the world are worth only what people will pay for them. If you can raise someone's expectation … if you can make them *need* something … that is the source of wealth. Owning things of value is secondary to creating things of value where none once existed."

The carriage stopped. Outside, an intimidating flight of stone steps led up to the very bank pictured on the coin. Uncle Edwarn waited for the coachman to open his door, but Waxillium hopped down on his own.

Uncle Edwarn met him on the steps. "Your father," Uncle said, "is hopeless with economics. I have worked on him for years, but he cannot—or will not—learn. I have great expectations of you, Waxillium. Banking is not your only option for serving your house. However, after today I suspect you will recognize it as the best one."

"I'm not going to be a banker," Waxillium said, climbing the steps.

"Oh? You have your eye on administering the teamsters after all?"

"No," Waxillium said. "I'm going to be a hero."

His uncle chose not to reply immediately as they approached the top of the steps. Finally, he said softly, "You are twelve years old, and you still speak of this? I expect such foolishness from your sister, but your father should have beaten it out of you by now."

Waxillium turned defiant eyes up at his uncle.

"The day of heroes has passed," Uncle Edwarn said. "The stories of people breaking out of history belong to another world. We have reached an era of modernism, both louder and more silent at the same time. You watch. Where once kings and warriors shaped the world, now quiet men in offices will do the same—and do it far, far more effectively."

They entered the bank lobby, which had a low ceiling and a wall of cagelike bars with hunched-over people inside who received or disbursed cash from or to those who waited in lines. Waxillium's uncle led him around to the back. The dark wood furnishings and mold-colored rug made it feel like dusk in the room, even with windows open and gas lamps burning.

"There are two appointments today I wanted you to observe," Uncle Edwarn said as they entered a long, unadorned room. The chairs faced the wall; this was a viewing room, a place to spy upon meetings in the bank. His uncle gestured for him to sit, then pulled aside a panel in the wall, revealing a glass slit that let them see the two people in the next room. One was a male banker in a vest and slacks. He sat at an imposing desk, speaking with a middle-aged man in dusty clothing, holding a felt cap in his fingers.

"The loan will help us move up," the dirty man said. "Get a place out of the slums. I have three sons. We'll work hard, I promise you we will."

The banker looked down his nose at the man, then riffled through papers. Uncle Edwarn closed the slit, surprising Waxillium with the abrupt motion. His uncle rose and Waxillium followed, moving to another set of chairs along the same wall. A second spy slit let them look in on another room similar to the first. A female banker in vest and skirt sat behind a similarly intimidating desk. The patron, however, was tall, clean, and relaxed.

"Are you certain you need *another* boat, Lord Nikolin?" the banker asked.

"Of course I'm certain. Would I bother coming here if I weren't serious? Honestly. You people should allow my steward to make these arrangements. That's what stewards are *for,* after all."

Uncle Edwarn closed the slit with a quiet snap, then turned to Waxillium. "You are watching a revolution."

"A revolution?" Waxillium asked. He'd studied banking—well, he'd been forced to study it by his tutors. "This sounds like what happens every day at a bank."

"Ah," Uncle Edwarn said. "You know all this already. And to which of these men will we give a loan?"

"The rich one," Waxillium said. "Assuming he's not lying or acting somehow."

"No, Nikolin is legitimately wealthy," Uncle Edwarn said. "He has banked with us numerous times in the past, and he never misses his payments."

"So you'll loan money to him and not the other."

"Wrong," Uncle Edwarn said. "We'll lend to both."

"You'll use the good credit of the rich man to underwrite the risk of helping the poor man?"

Uncle Edwarn seemed surprised. "Your tutors have been diligent."

Waxillium shrugged, but inwardly he found himself growing interested. Perhaps this was a way to become a hero. Maybe Uncle Edwarn was right and the frontier was shrinking, the need for men of action vanishing. Maybe this new world wasn't at all like the one that the Ascendant Warrior and the Survivor had lived in.

Waxillium could carefully balance risks, and give money to those who needed it. If men in suits would someday run the world, couldn't they also make it a better place?

"Your assessment is correct on one hand," Uncle Edwarn said, oblivious to the direction Waxillium had been thinking, "but flawed on the other. Yes, we will lend to the poor man—but we will not accept risk to do so."

"But—"

"The papers our banker is now presenting will tie the laborer in debt that is impossible to escape. If he fails to meet payments, his signature on that paper will allow us to go directly to his employer and take a percentage of his wages. If that isn't enough, we can do the same for his sons. The rich man has banked with us many times, and his house negotiated favorable terms. We will earn barely three percent on what we lend him. But the laborer is desperate, and no other bank will consider him. He'll pay us *twelve* percent."

Uncle Edwarn leaned in. "The other banks don't see it yet. They lend safely, and safely only. They have not changed as the world has. Workers earn more now than they ever did, and they’re hungry to pay for things once outside their reach. In the last six months we have pushed aggressively to lend to the common people of the city. They flock to us, and will soon make us very, very wealthy.”

“You’ll make slaves of them,” Waxillium said, horrified.

His uncle took out the error coin and set it on the counter beside Waxillium. “This coin is a mistake. An embarrassment. Now it is worth more than thousands of its companions combined. Value created where none once existed. I will take the poor of this city and make of them the same thing. As I said, a revolution.”

Waxillium felt sick.

“The coin is for you,” Uncle Edwarn said, standing. “I wish it to be a reminder. The gift that will—”

Waxillium snatched the coin off the counter, then bolted out the door.

“Waxillium!” his uncle called.

The bank was a labyrinth, but Waxillium found his way. He burst into the small room where the poor man sat in consultation with the loan officer. The laborer looked up from the stack of papers; he’d be barely literate. He wouldn’t even know what he was signing.

Waxillium set the coin down on the desk before him. “This is a misprinted coin, something that collectors covet. Take it, sell it at a curiosities shop—don’t take less than two thousand for it—and use the money to move your family out of the slum. Don’t sign those documents. They’ll be like a chain around your neck.”

* * *

Wax paused in his story. He held the coin in front of him, studying it as he and Steris rode toward the party.

“Well?” Steris asked, sitting across from him in the carriage. “What did your uncle do?”

“He was livid, of course,” Wax said. “The laborer signed the papers; he couldn’t believe that I’d actually give him something so valuable. My uncle came in, wove lies in the air like pretty puffs of colored smoke, and got his documents.”

Wax turned the coin over, looking at the image of the Lord Mistborn pressed into the front. “The laborer—his name was Jendel—killed himself by jumping off a bridge eight years later. His sons are still in debt to the bank, though House Ladrian no longer owns an interest in the First Central Bank; my uncle sold it off for capital before gutting the house and faking his death.”

“I’m sorry,” Steris said softly.

“It’s part of what drove me away,” Wax said. “Events like that—and what happened in the Village, of course. I told myself I was setting out to find adventure; I never intended to be a lawman. I think I knew, deep down, that I couldn’t change anything in Elendel. It was too big, the men in suits too crafty. Out in the Roughs, one man with a gun meant something. Here, it’s hard to see him as anything other than a relic.”

Steris pursed her lips, and obviously didn’t know what to say. Wax didn’t blame her. He’d thought often of the events in that bank, and he still didn’t know what—if anything—he could have done differently.

He flipped the coin over in his fingers. Scratched onto the back, in tiny letters, were the words *Why did you leave, Wax?*

“How did Bleeder get the coin?” Steris asked.

“I can’t fathom,” Wax said. “I sold it before going to the Roughs. My father had cut me off by then, and I needed money to outfit myself for the trip.”

“And those words?”

“I don’t know,” Wax said, pocketing the coin. “Thing is, remembering that story bothers me. I told myself at the time that I was trying to help the man, but I don’t think that was true. Looking back, I was just trying to anger my uncle.

“I’m still like that, Steris. Why did I leave for the Roughs? I wanted to be a hero—I wanted to be seen and known. I could have done a great deal of good by taking a position in my house here in Elendel, but I’d have had to do it quietly. Leaving, then eventually trying to make a name for myself as a lawman, was ultimately selfish. Even joining the constables here sometimes seems like an act of insufferable hubris to me.”

“I doubt that you care,” Steris said, leaning in, “but I consider your motives to be irrelevant. You save lives. You … saved *my* life. My gratitude is not influenced by what was running through your head as you did so.”

Wax met her eyes. Steris was prone to this—startling moments of pure honesty, where she stripped everything away and laid herself bare.

The carriage slowed, and Steris’s eyes flicked toward the window. “We have arrived, but it will take us time to get in. There are many carriages in front of us.”

Wax frowned, opening his window and leaning his head out. Indeed, a line of carriages and even a few motors clogged the way into the coach portico of ZoBell Tower. The skyscraper towered some twenty stories up into the night sky, its top disappearing in the dark mists.

Wax pulled back into the carriage, mist tumbling in through the now-open window beside him. Steris glanced at it, but did not ask him to close the shade.

“I guess we’ll be late,” Wax said.

Unless, of course, he improvised.

“This is the first party in the space atop the tower,” Steris said, taking a small planning notebook out of her handbag, “and the coach attendants aren’t accustomed to this heavy traffic.”

Wax smiled. “You accounted for this delay, did you?”

Steris stopped on a page in her notebook, then turned it around. There, in her neat handwriting, was a detailed agenda for their evening at the party. The third entry read, *8:17. Way into the building likely blocked by traffic. Lord Waxillium carries us up to the top floor by Allomancy, which is completely inappropriate and at the same time breathtaking.*

He raised an eyebrow, checking his pocket watch, which he carried in his gunbelt—not his vest—to be easily dropped with his other metals. “It’s 8:13. You’re slipping.”

“Traffic on the promenade was lighter than I expected.”

“You really want to do this the hard way?”

“I believe this will actually be the easy way,” Steris said. “Completely inappropriate though.”

“Completely.”

“Fortunately, you have a reputation for that sort of thing, and I can’t be expected to keep you reined in. I did wear dark undergarments, though, so they won’t be as visible from below while we are flying.”

Wax smiled, then reached under his seat, getting out the package that Ranette had sent him. He tucked that under his arm, then pushed open the door. “People underestimate you, Steris.”

“No,” she said, stepping out onto the misty sidewalk. He saw she wore shoes that fastened securely. Good. “They simply presume to know me when they do not. Understanding social conventions is not the same as condoning them. Now, how is it that we are to—*Oh!*”

She said the last part as Wax gathered her to him in a close embrace, then unholstered Vindication and shot a bullet into the ground—between three cobblestones—at their feet. He grinned as heads popped out of carriages all down the line. He'd have to leave Wayne and Marasi to fend for themselves this way, but that was likely better. Might keep eyes off those two.

Wax decreased his weight, oriented himself and Steris at the correct angle to the bullet, and *Pushed*. They shot into the air at a slant, soaring over the coaches in a line. He landed them on one of the skyscraper's decorative outcroppings a few stories up. Steris clung to him with the grip of a cat hanging above an ocean, her eyes wide. Then, cautiously, she released him and stepped up to the edge of the stonework, leaned out, and peered through the misty depths. Lights bobbed below: coaches, streetlamps, lanterns held high by footmen. In the mist, most were just bubbles and shadows.

"I feel like I'm afloat in a sea of smoke and fog," she said. The mists twisted and churned as if alive. Eddies and swirls seemed to move against the currents of air, always in motion.

Wax opened Ranette's package, getting out the length of tightly twined rope inside. He looked upward. Ranette's note said she wanted him to experiment with using a tether as he jumped with Allomancy, then provide her with feedback.

"You were eager to come tonight," Steris said. "It's more than wanting to meet the governor. You're working. I can see it in you."

Wax hefted the rope—which was weighted at one end with a hooked steel spike—getting a feel for what throwing it would be like.

"I can tell, you see," she said, "because you are fully awake. You are a predator, Waxillium Ladrian."

"I *hunt* predators."

"You are one too." She looked at him through the translucent mists dancing between them. Her eyes were alight, reflecting the glow from the sea of fog below. "You are like a lion. Most days you're only partially present, with me. Lounging, half asleep. You do what you must, you fulfill the needs of the house, but you don't thrive. Then the prey appears. You wake. The burst of speed, the fury and power; the pounding, pulsing, rush of the hunt. This is the real you, Waxillium Ladrian."

"If what you say is true, then all lawmen are predators."

"True lawmen, perhaps. I don't know that I've met another." She followed his gaze as he looked upward. "So, my question. What do you hunt tonight?"

“Bleeder will be here.”

“The murderer? How do you know?”

“She is going to try to kill the governor again,” Wax said. “She’ll want to test me, to see if she can get close, judge how I’ll react.”

“You act as if it’s personal, between the two of you.”

“I wish it were.” *Someone else moves us.* “I wish I knew Bleeder well enough for it to be personal, as that would give me an edge. But she certainly is interested in me, and that means I can’t skip this party. Otherwise she might take it as a sign that she should strike.”

Wax finished coiling the rope in one hand, then held it with the spiked end dangling free. He held out his hand, and Steris readily stepped up to him.

He searched out a metal line that pointed toward one of the steel girders in the stone under his feet. With so much rock separating them, it wouldn’t be as strong an anchor as otherwise—but it was large and solid, so it would work for his purposes. Holding Steris, he Pushed off it into the night air. Skyscrapers like this one presented a problem for him, since they tapered as they grew taller. In addition, many of the footholds he used were narrow ledges, which made it hard to get a Push directly upward—those Pushes often sent him slightly outward, away from the building at an angle. Either way, the higher he went, the farther from the wall he got. Usually, he could counter this with his shotgun and his ability to make himself lighter. That wouldn’t work while carrying Steris.

Ranette’s rope and spike might. He reached a height where he started to slow, his anchor getting too far to give him further lift. As usual, he’d drifted out some ten feet from the building. So, as he slowed, he flipped the spiked end toward a balcony and Pushed on it, shooting the tether toward the balcony frame. The hooked spike shot between the metal bars of the balcony, but then pulled free. He drifted to a stop, precarious, in danger of falling sideways away from the building. He cursed and tried again, and this time got the hook to lock in place.

He pulled them inward, like a fish reeling itself in. That got them to the balcony. He set Steris down and coiled the rope again, looking upward.

“That was well performed.”

“Too slow,” Wax said absently.

“Oh dear.”

He smiled, gathered her again, and Pushed them upward off the balcony. This time, as he drew near the halfway point to the party, he launched his hook toward a passing balcony at speed, hooking in place. He continued Pushing himself, moving up past the balcony on his right. Then a sharp pull on the rope made him pivot in the air as he flew, and he swung toward the building.

Wax hit the side of the building boots first, rope in one hand, the other arm wrapped around Steris. He then dropped them the few feet to the balcony. Better, better. The great liability of a Coinshot like himself was that he could only Push away from things, never Pull toward them. A tether could be useful indeed.

He wiggled the hook free. This was awkward. What if he needed to unhook it while flying, or fighting? Could Ranette make that hook able to unhitch on command somehow? He Pushed on the balcony, sending them upward again. Steris dug her fingers into his shoulders. Mists streamed lazily about them. A Coinshot grew very comfortable with heights—no matter how far he fell, dropping a single piece of metal and Pushing carefully let him land unharmed.

“I forget how disorienting this can be,” Wax said, slowing their ascent. “Close your eyes.”

“No,” Steris said. She seemed breathless. “This is … this is wonderful.”

I don’t think I’m ever going to understand that woman, he thought. He could have sworn she was terrified. The next few leaps went well as he got used to the tether. *The rope is way too bulky,* he thought. *Lugging this around would be a serious pain.* And the hook could easily get tangled. If he were using this in a fight, he’d probably have to leave the rope tether behind after the first leap.

Tonight it worked well enough though, and a moment later he swung them onto the top-floor balcony in a flurry of skirts and mistcoat tassels. A small group of partygoers stood here, and Wax’s arrival caused surprised exclamations and one dropped glass. Wax straightened, letting Steris down. Despite what she’d been through, she quickly composed herself, settling her skirts and pulling back her hair to smooth straggling locks.

“I believe,” she said softly, “that was an entrance befitting your station.”

“Alerted the guards, at least,” Wax said, nodding to the men who stood at the sides of the balcony, watching them. The men were doing their job, which was good to see. A Coinshot couldn’t enter this party unnoticed. They didn’t stop him, however. He was too important to bother.

Wax wound up the rope and spike, tying it at his waist within his coat, which made Steris roll her eyes. Then she rested her hand on his arm. Before leaving Ladrian Mansion, she'd coached him with precision on how to walk and stand—her sixth such coaching during their time together. Perhaps that was because he never did it as he was supposed to. Indeed, tonight he took her by the arm in a more familiar way than she'd explained. They were betrothed. Rusts, he could hold her by the arm.

Steris eyed him, but said nothing as Wax Pushed open the balcony doors with an Allomantic shove and they entered the party.

9

Standing at the foot of ZoBell Tower, Wayne watched Wax and Steris disappear into the mists. He shook his head, then took a ball of gum from the tin in his pocket. He'd gotten himself some of the stuff. It was actually fun to chew.

He popped it into his mouth and thought about what a rusted fool his friend was. Obviously, Wax persisted with this whole engagement-to-Steris mess because he missed Lessie so much. So Wax had chosen a marriage that demanded no emotional investment. That was easy to see as the bottom of your own glass at a pub with watered-down ale, that was.

Wayne held out his hand to help Marasi down from their coach. "You look nice," she told him. "I'm surprised you agreed to wear that."

Wayne glanced down at his sharply tailored suit, chewing absently. Marasi acted amazed that he had a suit, matched by a fancy bowler on his head and a dark green cravat. Why wouldn't he have a costume like this? He had beggar costumes, constable costumes, and old lady costumes. A fellow needed to be able to blend with his surroundings. In the Roughs, that meant having some pale brown cowhand's costume. In the city, that meant having a fancy twit costume.

The stupid line was so long that aluminum could have rusted in the time it took them to reach the halfway point. *Rusting Wax and his cheating ways*, Wayne thought. The man could have at least taken Wayne instead of Steris.

Up ahead, oddly, a couple was turned away, forced to trudge back toward their carriage despite all the waiting. *What's going on up there?* Fancy people like this didn't get turned away from parties, did they? Everyone had an invitation, even if his was forged. It was just like the one he'd given to the old tyrant at the school though.

Well, no telling until they arrived. And this line was still moving *sloooooooowwwww*.

"That fellow you caught ever say anything useful?" he asked Marasi.

"No," Marasi said. "He isn't all there, mentally. We did find what seems to be a Hemalurgic spike in him though."

"Rusts. You know 'bout that too?"

"I got to read the book," Marasi said absently. "Death *did* give it to me first, and Waxillium let me make a copy. Our captive had a piercing on some skin in his chest. After we removed that, he calmed. But he still won't talk."

Eventually, after seven crop rotations or so, they reached the front of the line. Marasi presented their invitation. The bouncer here looked it over, his face grim. "I'm afraid that we've been ordered to deny any nameless invitations not in the possession of the people they were sent to. With the attempt on the governor's life, only guests named on our list can be allowed in."

"But—" Marasi said.

"Here now," Wayne cut in. "We're important people. Don't you see how fancy my cravat is?"

Near the door, men in black coats stepped forward, threatening. Rusting government security. Constables, they were real people—oh, they might bust a man's neck now and then, but they came from the streets same as anyone. These spooks though … they barely had any soul to them.

"I saved the governor's life today," Marasi said. "Surely you won't turn *me* away."

"There's nothing I can do, I'm afraid," the bouncer said, his stern face completely expressionless.

Yeah, something was going on here. Wayne grabbed Marasi's arm, towing her aside. "Let's go. Rusting fools."

"But—"

Wayne glanced over his shoulder and, just at the right moment, tossed up a speed bubble. "Alrighty, then," he said. "New plan!"

"You sound excited," she said, glancing at the borders of the speed bubble. It was more distinct than usual, as the mist inside the bubble continued to shift and move while that outside hung frozen in the air like gauze.

"I'm an excitable type," Wayne said, hurrying back to the lectern where the bouncer stood. Wayne had managed to catch the lectern in his speed bubble, but not the bouncer. Right fine precision on his part. That little pedestal had a name manifest on it.

"I think you gave up too easily on getting in the ordinary way," Marasi said, folding her arms.

"Our names are on here," Wayne said, careful to keep moving as he read it over. "In a column of people specifically to be kept out. Wouldn't have mattered how well you argued."

"What?" she demanded, shoving up beside him. "Damn. I saved his *life*, the bastard."

"Marasi!" Wayne said, grinning. "You're startin' to talk normal-like."

"Because of you," she said, then paused. "Bastard."

He grinned, chewing his gum loudly. "You saved the governor's life, yeah, but it's probably his security who want to keep you out, not him. They've got mud on their faces because one of their own went rotten, and you embarrassed them by noticing first."

"But that's petty! They're playing with the governor's life!"

"Men are petty." He danced to the side.

"Why are you moving like that?"

"If I stay too long in one place, they have a chance of seeing me, even with how fast we're moving inside this bubble. If we keep moving we'll be a blur, and out in the mists that should be unnoticeable."

She reluctantly started moving.

Wayne glanced over the lists again, recognizing a name. "Here now. That one will work."

"Wayne, you're going to get us into trouble, aren't you?"

“Only if we get caught!” He pointed. “They have two lists—people they’re to turn away no matter what, and people they’re to allow. See the notes? Fourth name down? Says he sent word he might not come, and they’re to make certain nobody else uses his invitation.”

“Wayne,” Marasi said, “that’s Professor Hanlanaze. He’s a brilliant mathematician.”

“Hm,” Wayne said, rubbing his chin. “From the university.”

“No, from New Seran. He’s been behind some of the discoveries in combustion technology.”

Wayne perked up. “From outside the city. So people might not know him.”

“They will by reputation.”

“But personally?”

“He’s somewhat reclusive,” Marasi said. “He often gets invited to things like this, but rarely comes. Wayne, I see that look in your eye. You *can’t* imitate him.”

“What’s the worst that could come of it?”

“We get caught,” she said, still walking with him around the speed bubble. “We get thrown in prison, prosecuted for conspiracy, embarrass Waxillium.”

“Now that,” Wayne said, striding back to where he’d been standing when he’d sped up time, “is the best damn argument for trying this that anyone could make. Come back so I can drop this speed bubble. After that we’re gonna need to find us some weapons.”

Marasi paled, joining him. “If you are thinking of sneaking guns in—”

“Not guns,” Wayne said with a grin. “A different kind of weapon. *Math.*”

* * *

“So that kandra is in here,” Steris said softly from her place on Wax’s arm as she scanned the party room. “Somewhere.”

The penthouse of ZoBell Tower encompassed its entire top floor, with windows ringing the outside. Light from a dozen dim chandeliers played off wineglasses, diamond jewelry, sequins on sleek dresses. The dress style was new. Was he so oblivious to fashion that he had missed such a dramatic shift?

Steris wore more traditional attire—a kind of gauzy, draping white dress with a very small bustle and a distinct waist. However, it had sequins lining the collar and cuffs, and was more filmy—lighter than what she normally wore, and actually quite pretty on her. With the sequins, it shared something with these modern gowns.

The party attendees moved around several bars and numerous small displays set up on the red-carpeted floor. Wax and Steris passed one, a stand with a glass box enclosing a raw copper nugget as big as a man's head. Light glimmered on its surface.

Allomantic metals, Wax thought as they passed another display. Dozens of specimens, with plaques talking about where the nugget or vein had been mined. They provoked conversations around the room, clusters of people chatting as light played off the colorful drinks in their fingers.

"You're drawing attention," Steris noted. "I'm not certain wearing the coat was a wise move."

"The mistcoat is a symbol," Wax said. "It is a reminder." She'd talked him out of the hat, but not this.

"It makes you look like a ruffian."

"It's supposed to. Maybe they'll think twice about lying to me; I don't want to be part of their games."

"You are *already* part of their games, Lord Waxillium."

"Which is why I don't like coming to the parties." He held up his hand, cutting her off. "I know. It's important that we be here. Let's go chat with the partygoers you've planned for us to approach."

She always had a list, carefully prepared. Steris was the only person he'd ever heard of who brought an agenda to a cocktail party.

"No," she said.

"No?"

"That is what we commonly do," Steris said, giving a specific smile—she practiced different ones—to Lady Mulgrave as they passed. "Tonight's purpose is yours. Let us be about it and find that killer."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes," she said, waving to another couple. "It behooves a wife to be interested in, if not involved in, the passions of her spouse."

"You don't need to do that, Steris. I—"

"Please," she said softly. "I do."

Wax let the argument drop. Truth was, he was pleased. With the possibility that Bleeder was here somewhere, Wax wouldn't be able to relax anyway.

So how to find the creature? More importantly, how would he beat someone who could move in a blur? Unlike Allomancy—which burned at a few standard rates—Feruchemical powers could be used up all at once. Bleeder could drain her metalminds in a single burst of speed—and could probably take down dozens of people in an eyeblink. Maybe even hundreds. And Wax wouldn't be able to do a thing.

But perhaps she wouldn't have enough left for that. She couldn't just pop more metal in, like an Allomancer, and refill her reserves. She'd have to rely on what speed she had been able to store up, and she'd only stolen her spike recently. Killing the people at Winsting's party would have expended a large amount of what she'd theoretically been able to save up over the last few weeks.

So he had two options. Kill her before she moved, or somehow get her to waste her Feruchemical reserve without hurting anyone.

He stepped up to the bar, ordering drinks, then turned to scan the crowd. It had been two decades since he'd been a part of high society, and his two years back in Elendel hadn't yet polished off all the rust. Everyone here had the same counterfeit way about them—they chatted with a studied air of merriment while secretly pursuing their own agendas. There was no better place for a murderer to blend in than this.

Drinks in hand, Wax stepped down from the bar and turned on his steel bubble.

It wasn't something he'd always been able to do, and he wasn't entirely certain how he did it. Oh, the basic mechanics were obvious: he burned steel, then Pushed lightly outward from himself in all directions at once. But how had he learned to exempt metal he himself carried? He still didn't know. It was just something that had happened, over time.

With the bubble on, his Allomantic instincts searched out any bits of metal moving quickly toward him, and would Push on those with increasing force as they drew closer. He was getting better and better at that. Standing and letting Darriance shoot at his chest while wearing about twelve inches of padding and armor had helped. He couldn't dodge bullets, but the bubble helped.

"What did you just do?" Steris asked as he reached her. "My bracelet wants to leap off my arm."

"Remove it," Wax said. "If there's an Allomantic fight, I don't want you wearing any metals."

Steris raised an eyebrow, but took off the bracelet and dropped it in her handbag. Wax mentally added an exception for it.

"I don't know that it will matter," Steris said. "This place is positively teeming with metal. What are you doing with your drink?"

Wax looked up. He'd just finished covertly dumping a bit of brown powder into his cup. "I got water," he said. "The powder will make it look like I'm drinking brandy. If I can feign drunkenness later, it might give me an edge."

"Fascinating," Steris said. She seemed genuinely impressed.

They moved through the room, passing under a chandelier. The separate bits of crystal—which had wires suspending them—moved subtly away from Wax, like the needle of a compass confronted by a magnet's matching pole. He accidentally knocked a nugget off a pedestal as they passed. Rusts. Against his better judgment, he dampened his steel bubble.

"Let's find the governor," Steris said.

Wax nodded. He couldn't shake the feeling that no matter which way he turned, someone had a gun pointed at his back.

Someone else moves us, lawman.

Red on the bricks. Lessie in his arms, already dead. His hands stained with her blood.…

No. He'd moved past that. He'd *grieved*. He wouldn't be sucked down into that spiral again. As they continued through the party, a pair of lesser nobles wearing dark colors moved to intercept them, but Wax gave them a glare, which was enough to get them to back off.

"Lord Waxillium…" Steris said.

"What?" Wax asked. "You said we were going to the governor."

"That doesn't mean you can growl at everyone else."

"I didn't growl." Did he?

"Let me handle it next time," Steris said, guiding them around a pedestal displaying—oddly—nothing at all. The plaque read: ATIUM, THE LOST METAL.

As they neared the governor—who stood holding court near the windows on the north side—a man in a bright yellow bow tie noticed Wax. Great. Lord Stenet. He would want to talk about textile tariffs again. But of course he wouldn't *say* that, not at first. People never said what they meant around here.

"Lord Waxillium!" Stenet said. "I was just thinking about you! How are your wedding arrangements proceeding? Should I look forward to an invitation soon?”

“Not too soon,” Steris said. “We’ve only just settled on a priest. What of you? Your engagement is the talk of the city!”

His face fell. “Oh. Now, about that…” He cleared his throat. Steris prodded, but in a moment Stenet had found an excuse, changed the topic, then politely retreated.

“What was that about?” Wax said.

“He’s been cheating on her,” Steris said absently. “Naturally, the topic makes him uncomfortable.”

“Nice work,” Wax said. “You’re very good at this.”

“I’m proficient at it.”

“I believe that’s what I said.”

“There is a distinction,” Steris said with a shake of her head. “In this room there are true masters of social interaction. I am not one of them. I studied social norms, researched them, and now I execute them. Another woman might have sailed through that conversation and left him happy, but distracted. I had to use blunt force, so to speak.”

“You are a bizarre woman, Steris.”

“Says the only man in the room with guns on his hips,” she replied, “a man who is unconsciously trying to Push the earrings out of the ears of every woman we pass. You didn’t notice Lady Remin losing her ring into her drink, did you?”

“Missed that.”

“Pity. It was entertaining. Here, step this way; we don’t want to get into a conversation with Lord Bookers. He is dreadfully boring.”

Wax followed her down three steps, passing a display shining with nuggets of tin that rattled at his passing, alongside pictures of famous Tineyes, including several sketches of the Lord Mistborn—who had been a Tineye before the Catacendre. *Funny, that Steris would remark on someone being boring.…*

“You’re thinking,” Steris said, “that it is ironic that I would note that someone is a bore—as I myself have a reputation for the same personality flaw.”

“I would not have phrased it like that.”

“It’s all right,” Steris said. “As I have said many times before, I am aware of my reputation. I must embrace my nature. I recognize another bore as you might recognize a master Allomancer—as a colleague whose arts I don't particularly wish to sample."

Wax found himself smiling.

"As a side note," Steris said softly as she steered them toward where the governor was speaking with the lord of House Erikell, "if you do find the murderer, steer me in her direction. I shall endeavor to fascinate her with details of our house finances. With luck, she'll fall asleep in her drink and drown, and I shall have my first kill."

"Steris! That was actually amusing."

She blushed. Then she got a conspiratorial look on her face. "I cheated, if you must know."

"… Cheated?"

"I know you enjoy witty conversation," she said, "so I prepared earlier, writing myself a list of things I could say that you would find engaging."

Wax laughed. "You have plans for everything, don't you?"

"I like to be thorough," she said. "Though admittedly, sometimes I can be *so* thorough that I end up needing to plan how to best make my plans. My life ends up feeling like a beautiful ship in dry dock, built with eighteen rudders pointing in different directions to be *extra* certain that a steering mechanism is in place." She hesitated, then blushed again. "Yes. That quip was on my list."

Wax laughed anyway. "Steris, I think this is the most genuine I've ever seen you."

"But I'm being fake. I prepared the lines ahead of time. I'm not *actually* being diverting."

"You'd be surprised at how many people do the same thing," Wax said. "Besides, this *is* you. So it's genuine."

"Then I'm always genuine."

"I guess so. I just didn't realize it before."

They stepped toward Innate, putting them close enough that the governor would notice them waiting. Nearby, other couples and groups shot them covert looks. As the lord of a major house, Wax outranked almost everyone in the room. Old noble titles were coming to matter less and less, but with Steris's money backing him, he'd been able to dig himself out of many of his debts. That in turn had allowed him to avoid foreclosures, and he'd been able to hold out until other investments came through. House Ladrian was again one of the wealthiest in the city. Increasingly, that was more important than a noble pedigree.

He found it unfortunate, though not surprising, how often noble birth aligned with economic and political power. The Lord Mistborn's laws, based upon the Last Emperor's ideal, were supposed to put power into the hands of common men. And yet the same groups just kept on ruling. Wax was one of them. How guilty should he feel?

Already I fear that I have made things too easy for men.…

Drim, the governor's chief bodyguard and head of security, stepped up to Wax. "I suppose you'll be next," the thick-necked man growled. "My men at the doors let you keep your guns, I hear."

"Let me tell you, Drim," Wax said, "if the governor is in the slightest bit of danger, you *want* a gun in my hands."

"I suppose. A gun doesn't mean much to you anyway, does it? You could kill with the spare change in your pocket."

"Or a pair of cuff links. Or the tacks holding the carpet to the floor."

Drim grunted. "Too bad about your deputy."

Wax snapped his attention on Drim. "Wayne. What about him?"

"He's a security threat," Drim said. "Had to turn him away down below."

Wax relaxed. "Oh. All right, then."

Drim smiled, obviously feeling he'd won something from the conversation. He backed up to take his place by the wall, watching those who came to speak with the governor.

"You're not concerned about Wayne?" Steris asked softly.

"Not anymore. I worried he'd find the party so boring, he would wander off. Instead, the good man there kindly gave Wayne a challenge."

"So … you're saying he'll sneak in?"

"If Wayne isn't in here somewhere already," Wax said, "I'll eat your handbag and try to burn it for Allomantic power."

They continued to wait. The governor's current interlocutor, Lady Shayna, was a long-winded blowhard, but after the political and financial support she'd given him, even the governor couldn't turn her away. Wax looked around, wondering where Wayne would be.

"Lord Waxillium Ladrian," a feminine voice said. "I've heard about you. You're more handsome than the stories say."

He raised his eyebrows toward the speaker, a tall woman waiting to see the governor. Very tall—she had a few inches on him at least. With luscious lips and a large chest, she had creamy skin and hair the color of gunpowder, and she was wearing a red dress missing most of its top half.

"I don't believe we've met," Steris said, her voice cool.

"I'm called Milan," the woman said. She didn't bother to look at Steris, but inspected Wax up and down, then smiled in a mysterious way. "Lord Waxillium, you wear sidearms and a Roughs-style mistcoat to a cocktail party. Bold."

"There is nothing bold about doing what one has always done," Wax said. *Flirting with a man while his fiancée stands beside him, however …*

"You have an interesting reputation," Milan continued. "Are the things they say about you true?"

"Yes."

She pursed her lips, smiling, expecting more. Instead, he met her eyes and waited. She shuffled, moving her cup from one hand to another, then excused herself, walking off.

"Wow," Steris said. "And they say *I* can make people uncomfortable."

"You learn the stare early," Wax said, returning his attention to the governor. In the back of his mind, he assessed the woman Milan and decided to keep an eye on her. Had that been Bleeder in disguise, trying to feel him out? Or had it been just another foolish partygoer with a bit too much wine in her and an inflated opinion of how men would respond to her?

Rusts, this is going to be tough.

* * *

Wayne sauntered about the party, his tiny dining plate stacked with food as high as he could get it. Why did they always use such tiny plates at fancy parties? To keep people from eating too much? Rusts. Rich folk didn't make sense. They gave away the most expensive booze in the city, then worried about people eating all of the little sausages?

Wayne was a rebel. He refused to play by their rules, yes he did. He quickly laid out a battle plan. The ladies with the little sausages came out from behind the east bar, while the west bar was preparing the salmon crackers. Tiny sandwiches to the north, and desserts of various sorts to the south. If he made a round of the penthouse room in exactly thirteen minutes, he could hit each station just as the servants were entering with fresh platters.

They were starting to give him glares. A fellow knew he was doing his job right when he got those kinds of glares.

Marasi stayed nearby, playing the part of Professor Hanlanaze's assistant. Wayne scratched at his beard. He didn't like beards, but Marasi said the few evanotype pictures of Professor Hanlanaze showed him wearing one. Hanlanaze was far thicker at the waist than Wayne was too. That was great. You could hide all kinds of stuff in padding like that.

"I still can't believe you had all of this in the carriage," Marasi whispered, then she stole one of his sausages. Right off his plate. Outrageous!

"My dear woman," Wayne said, scratching his head, where he wore a colorful Terris cap, a proud emblem of Hanlanaze's lineage. "Being a qualified academic depends, before anything else, upon suitable preparation. I would no sooner leave my home without appropriate equipment for every eventuality than I would work in my lab without proper safety precautions!"

"It's the voice that truly *makes* the disguise, you know," Marasi said. "How do you do it?"

"Our accents are clothing for our thoughts, my dear," Wayne said. "Without them, everything we say would be stripped bare, and we might as well be screaming at one another. Oh look. The dessert lady has chocolate pastries again! I *do* find those irresistible."

He stepped toward them, but a comment cut him off. "Professor Hanlanaze?"

Wayne froze.

"Why, it *is* you!" the voice said. "I didn't believe you'd actually come." A tall man approached, wearing so much plaid that you could have strung him up on a pole and made a war banner out of him.

On one hand Wayne was pleased. He'd only had Marasi's description of Hanlanaze to go on in creating his disguise, so the fact that he fooled someone who had obviously seen the professor's picture was impressive.

On the other hand … damn.

Wayne handed Marasi his plate, giving her a stern glare that said "Don't eat these." Then he took the newcomer's hand. That suit's fabric really was something. The mill that made it must have used up an entire year's quota of stripes.

"And you are?" Wayne asked, pinching his voice. He'd found that big men like Professor Hanlanaze often had voices that sounded smaller than the person was. He was glad he'd been studying southern accents. Of course he also injected some of a university accent into it, and set both on a base of Thermolian “v” sounds, from the outer village where the professor had grown up.

Getting a good accent was like mixing a paint to match one already on a wall. If you didn’t blend just right, the flaws could look much worse than if you’d chosen a different color entirely.

“I’m Rame Maldor,” the man said, shaking Wayne’s hand. “You know … the paper on the Higgens effect?”

“Ah yes,” Wayne said, releasing the hand and stepping back. He gave a good impression of being nervous around so many people, and it sold better than two-penny drinks the day after Truefast. Indeed, Maldor was perfectly willing to give the supposed recluse plenty of space.

That let Wayne speed up time around him and Marasi only.

“What in Harmony’s wrists is he talking about?” Wayne hissed.

From her bag, Marasi retrieved the book that she’d purchased at a nearby shop while Wayne was getting into his costume. She soon found the page she wanted. “The Higgens effect. Has to do with the way a spectral field is influenced by magnets.” She flipped a few pages. “Here, try this.…” She rattled off some gibberish to Wayne, who nodded and dropped the speed bubble.

“The Higgens effect is old news!” Wayne said. “I’m much more interested in the way that a static *electric* field produces similar results. Why, you should *see* the work we are near to completing!”

Rame got pale in the face. “But … But … I was going to study that effect myself!”

“Then you’re behind by at least three years!”

“Why didn’t you mention this in our letters?”

“And reveal my next discovery?” Wayne said.

Rame stumbled away, then dashed for the lift. Wayne had never seen a scientist move so quickly. You’d have thought someone was handing out free lab coats in the lobby.

“Oh dear,” Marasi said. “You realize the chaos this might cause in their field?”

“Yup,” Wayne said, taking his plate of food back. “It will be good for them. It’ll stop them from sittin’ around and thinkin’ so much.”

“Wayne, they’re scientists. Isn’t that their *job*?”

“Hell if I know,” Wayne said, stuffing a little sausage in his mouth. “But rusts, if it is, that would explain *so much*.”

* * *

Governor Innate finished his conversation and turned toward Wax. Drim, the bodyguard, waved them forward. He didn’t like Wax, but from what Wax knew of the man, Drim was solid, loyal and dependable. He understood that Wax wasn’t a threat.

Unfortunately, Drim didn’t know the threat they *were* facing. A kandra … it could be anyone. Wax wouldn’t have been so trusting.

Wouldn’t I? he thought, shaking the governor’s hand. *What if the kandra is Drim? Have I considered that?*

That was how Bleeder had gotten in to kill Lord Winsting, after all. She had been wearing the face of someone Winsting’s men trusted. *Rusting iron on a hillside,* Wax thought. *This is going to be very, very hard.*

“Lord Waxillium?” Innate asked. “Are you well?”

“I’m sorry, my lord,” Wax said. “My thoughts were called away for a moment. How is Lady Innate?”

“She had a moment of passing nausea,” the governor said, kissing Steris’s hand. “And went home to lie down. I will tell her you asked after her. Lady Harms, you look lovely this evening.”

“And you are ever a gentleman,” Steris replied, giving him a genuine smile. Steris liked the governor, though politically they were opposites—Steris calculatedly progressive, as she figured would be expected of new money looking to advance, while Innate was conservative. But that sort of thing didn’t bother Steris. She liked people whose motives made sense, and she felt Innate’s political record was orderly. “I hope Lady Allri will recover soon.”

“It is an ailment of nerves more than anything else,” Innate said. “She did not react well to what happened today.”

“You seem to be doing remarkably,” Wax said. “All things considered.”

“The would-be assassin was one of our newer guards, and was mentally unhinged. He had terrible aim, and likely didn’t even *actually* intend to kill me.” The governor chuckled. “Would that the Survivor would always send such enemies to me, and often around election season.”

Wax cracked a forced smile, then glanced to the side. That woman from before, the pretty one with the large eyes, stood nearby. Who else was suspiciously near?

Bleeder won't be someone I can spot easily, Wax thought. *The Faceless Immortals have centuries of practice blending into human society.*

"What is your take on it, Lord Waxillium?" Innate asked. "What were the man's motives?"

"He was provoked to the attack," Wax said. "It was a distraction. Someone else killed your brother; they will try again for you."

Nearby, Drim stood up straight, glancing at him.

"Curious," Innate said. "But you're known for jumping at shadows, are you not?"

"Every lawman follows a bum lead on occasion."

"I believe you'll find Lord Waxillium to be right far more often than he is wrong, my lord," Steris said. "If he warns of danger, I would listen."

"I will," Innate said.

"I want to meet with you," Wax said, "so we can discuss important matters. Tomorrow at the latest. You need to hear what we're dealing with."

"I will schedule it." From Innate, that was a promise. Wax would have his meeting. "Lady Harms, might I ask after your cousin? I've yet to thank her for what she did today, even if the man's aim was off, and I would have been safe anyway."

"Marasi is well," Steris said. "She should be coming up here tonight to—"

Look at them.

The thought forced its way into Wax's head. Steris and the governor continued to speak, but he froze.

They dress in painted sequins. They drink wine. They laugh, and smile, and play, and dance, and eat, and quietly kill. All part of Harmony's plan. All actors on a stage. That's what you are too, Waxillium Ladrian. It's what all men are.

A chill moved over Wax, like ants running across his skin. The thoughts in his head were a voice, like Harmony's, but rasping and crude. Brutal. A terrible whisper.

Wax was still wearing his earring. Bleeder had found out how to communicate with someone wearing a Hemalurgic spike.

The murderer was in his head.

10

Wayne turned as the sausage lady passed. He intended to reach for another handful. Instead he got slapped.

He blinked, at first assuming that the servers had finally gotten tired of him outthinking them. But the slapper hadn’t been one of them. It was a child. He fixed his stare on the young girl as Marasi hurried back to his side. Why, this child couldn’t be more than fifteen. And she’d *slapped* him!

“You,” the girl said, “are a *monster*.”

“I—”

“Remmingtel Tarcsel!” the girl said. “Do you think anyone in this party has heard that name before?”

“Well—”

“No, they haven’t. I’ve asked. They all stand here using my father’s incandescent lights—which he toiled for *years* to create—and nobody knows his name. Do you know why, Mister Hanlanaze?”

“I suspect I don’t—”

“Because you stole his designs, and with them his life. My father died clipless, destitute and depressed, because of men like you. You aren’t a scientist, Mister Hanlanaze, whatever you claim. You're not an inventor. You're a thief."

"That part's right. I—"

"I'll have the better of you," the girl hissed, stepping up to him and poking him right in the gut, almost where he'd hidden his dueling canes. "I have *plans*. And unlike my father, I know that this world isn't just about who has the best ideas. It's about the people who can market those ideas. I'm going to find investors and change this city. And when you're crying, destitute and discredited, you remember my father's name and what you did."

She spun on her heel—long, straight blonde hair slapping him in the face—and stalked away.

"What the hell was that?" Wayne whispered.

"The price of wearing someone else's likeness, I guess," Marasi said. Rusting woman sounded *amused*!

"Her daddy," Wayne said. "She said … I killed her daddy…"

"Yeah. Sounds like Hanlanaze has some dirt in his past."

Hanlanaze. Right. Hanlanaze. The professor.

"I've read broadsheet columns by that girl," Marasi said. "It's a real shame, if it's true those inventions were stolen."

"Yeah," Wayne said, rubbing his cheek. "Shame." He eyed the plate of little sausages as it passed, but couldn't find the will to chase it down. The fun was gone, for some reason.

Instead he went looking for Wax.

* * *

"Excuse me," Wax said to the governor and Steris.

Both turned astonished eyes on him as he walked away. A rude move. He didn't let himself care. He stepped into the center of the room, instincts screaming at him.

Guns out!

Firefight coming!

Find cover!

Run.

He did none of those things, but he couldn't keep his eye from twitching. With his steel burning, a spray of small, translucent blue lines connected him to nearby sources of metal. He was in the habit of ignoring those.

Now he watched them. Quivering, shifting, the rhythm and pulse of a hundred people in a room. Trays for food, jewelry, spectacles. Metal parts in the tables and chairs. So much metal that made the framework for the lives of men and women. They were the flesh of civilization, and steel was now its skeleton.

So, you realize what I am, the voice said in his mind. Feminine, but rasping.

No, what are you? Wax sent back. A test.

Harmony spoke to you. I know that he did.

You're a koloss, Wax said, using the wrong word on purpose.

You dance for Harmony, the voice replied. *You bend and move at his direction. You don't care how poor an excuse for a god he is.*

Wax wasn't certain—there was no way to be certain—but it seemed that Bleeder couldn't read his mind. The kandra could only send out thoughts. What was it Harmony had said? That hearing thoughts had come from Preservation, but inserting them from Ruin?

Wax turned slowly about the room, watching those lines. Bleeder wouldn't have any metal on her. People who were metallically aware were more careful about things like that. The governor's guards, for example. Half of them carried guns, but the other half only dueling canes.

How do you stand it, Wax? Bleeder asked. *Dwelling among them. Like living up to your knees in sewage.*

"Why did you kill Winsting?" Wax asked out loud.

I killed him because he had to die. I killed him because nobody else would.

"So you're a hero," Wax said, turning about. *She's close by,* he thought. *Watching me. Who? Which one?*

And if he thought he'd figured it out … did he dare fire first?

The strike of lightning is not a hero, Bleeder said. *The earthquake is not a hero. These things simply exist.*

Wax started walking through the room. Perhaps Bleeder would try to move along with him. He kept his hands to the sides, a coin in each fist. No guns yet. That would provoke a panic. "Why the governor?" Wax asked. "He is a good man."

There are no good men, Bleeder said. *Choice is an illusion, lawman. There are those created to be selfish and there are those created to be* *selfless. This does not make them good or evil, any more than the ravaging lion is evil when compared to the placid rabbit.*

"You called them sewage."

Sewage is not evil. That does not make it desirable.

Bleeder's voice in his mind seemed to take on more personality as she spoke. Soft, haunting, morose. Like Bloody Tan had been.

Someone else moves us.…

"And you?" Wax asked. "Which are you? Wolf or rabbit?"

I am the surgeon.

The woman, the beauty in red, followed him. She tried to be surreptitious about it, walking over to a group to meet them and chat—but she moved parallel to Wax. There was another person following too. A short man in a server's outfit carrying a tray of food. He made his rounds, but the other servers moved clockwise. Wax was going counterclockwise.

Were they close enough to hear him speaking? Not with natural ears. Perhaps Bleeder could burn tin. If that was the power she'd chosen for the evening.

You are a surgeon too, Bleeder said. *They call you lord, they smile at you, but you aren't one of them. If only you could be truly free. If only …*

"I follow the law," Wax whispered. "What do you follow?"

Bleeder gave no reply to that. The whisper, perhaps, had kept her from hearing.

The governor is corrupt, Bleeder said. *He spent years covering for his brother, but in truth he would have done better covering for himself.*

Wax looked to the side. He'd circled the room at this point, almost back to where he'd started. That server had followed all the way.

I have much work to do, Bleeder said. *I need to free everyone in this city. Harmony crushes his palm against society, smothering it. He claims to not interfere, but then moves us like pieces on a board.*

"So you'll kill the governor?" Wax said. "That will somehow free the city?"

Yes, it will, Bleeder said. *But of course I can't kill him yet, Wax. I haven't even murdered your father yet.*

Wax felt suddenly cold. But his father was already dead. He spun, hand on his gun, and met the eyes of the server. The man froze, his eyes wide.

Then he ran.

Wax cursed, dashing after and flipping a coin out in front of himself. It spun in the air, but the waiter ducked behind a group of people. Wax gritted his teeth and let the coin drop without Pushing on it, instead unslinging Vindication. This prompted cries of worry from those in the party. The waiter ducked behind groups of people, ready to dodge Wax.

Fortunately, he—or she, or whatever—wasn't ready for Wayne, who surged out between two plump women with cups of wine and flung himself at the waiter. Both went down in a heap. Wax slowed, raising his gun, taking aim. He couldn't give Bleeder a chance to use Allomancy or Feruchemy, particularly if he was wrong about her using tin right now. A shot to the head wouldn't kill a kandra, he guessed, but it should slow her down. Wax just had to be certain not to hit Wayne in the wrong—

The governor's guards piled on top of Wayne and Bleeder. Wax cursed, dashing forward, Vindication up beside his head and mistcoat flapping behind him. He leaped over cowering partygoers—Pushing off tacks in the floor to get some height—and came down near the group of struggling guards.

Wayne, wearing a false beard and swearing like a canal worker with a headache, flailed about as five security guards held him.

"Let him go!" Wax said. "That's my deputy. Where's the other one?"

The guards stumbled about, all but one, who lay on the floor. Bleeding from the gut.

Wax snapped his head up, spotting a man in a waiter's outfit pushing his way toward the room's outer wall nearby. Wax leveled Vindication and took aim.

You should know, Bleeder said, *that I was sad about your lover's death. I hated that it was necessary.*

Wax's hand froze. Lessie. Dead.

Damn it, I'm past that! Wax squeezed the trigger anyway, but Bleeder ducked, skidding to the ground. The bullet punched a hole in the window above the man's head.

Bleeder threw a chair at the weakened window, shattering it. Then, as Wax fired again, he leaped through.

Twenty-plus stories in the air.

Wax bellowed, charging toward the window. Wayne joined him, grabbing Wax by the arm. "I'll hold on tightly, mate. Let's go."

“Stay,” Wax said, forcing himself to think through his turmoil of emotions. “Watch the governor. This might be a distraction, like the attempt earlier.”

Wax didn’t give Wayne a chance to complain. He shook out of the man’s grip, then threw himself into the mists.

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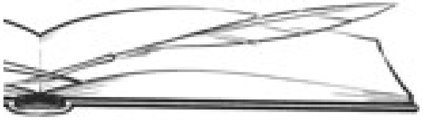

The Weather

Gentle westerly winds will pick up by the evening.

TION, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE

34/Issue
204/Week

EFFECTS LOODING

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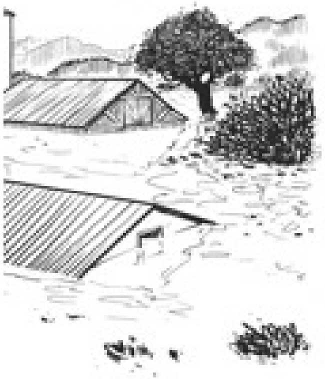

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for any person in the room. Had I not bested the tribes at the Pits of Eltania? Was I not the first to bring back tales of the slopes of the Ashmounts, now gone green with vegetation? And wasn't it I that had domesticated the fabled long-necked horses of the Plains of Kaermeron?

"I shall not lower this gun," said the man, "until you pay for your crimes."

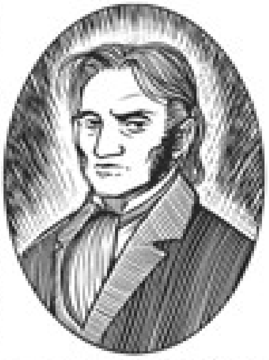
My enhanced senses picked up a faint tremor in the

Reckless Roughian Apprehends, Kills Marksman

A year has passed since the Fourth Octant Constabulary's unpopular Decision to deputize the controversial former Roughs lawman Lord Waxillium Ladrian, and the Octant continues to run from a long List of Embarrassments the man has caused.

Foremost are Waxillium "Wax" Ladrian's reckless Efforts to apprehend the notorious Marksman, who stole from institutions essential to the Commerce of our Grand City and took the life of an Innocent Child.

"Wax's" latest caper, though successful, also ended in the death of the accused (as well as an unidentified Bystander), robbing the City of the chance to see Justice done with a proper Trial. In the process Ladrian destroyed the motorcar of Lady Dorise Chevalle who was enjoying a leisurely Drive, and shot up the accounting offices of Linville & Lyons, doing over 400 Boxings of damage. Both have retained solicitors.



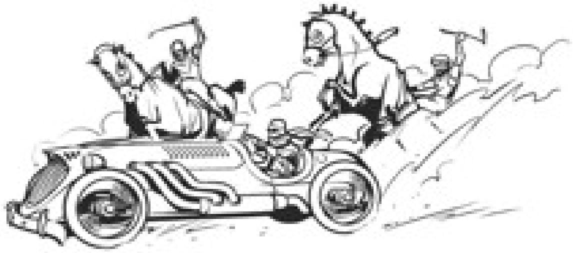
Lord Waxillium "Wax" Ladrian

DISTURBANCE At Lord Winsting Innate's cottage—*See Back, Column 8.*

CADMIUM MISTING slows time to "pulse" through stodgy board meeting—*See Back, Column 4.*

FAMOUS BAKER decorates exquisite pastries with flakes of atium—*See Back, Column 5.*

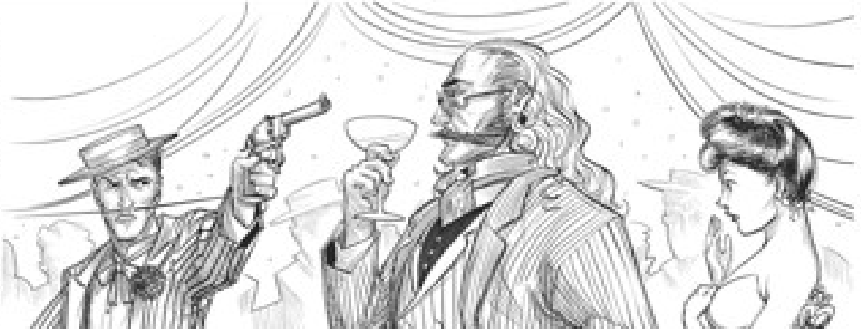
"Street Racing" Threatens Grand Old Sport



What do you hear the closer one gets to the Hub and the hour gets later? Motorcar engines growling like Roughs beasts and the yell of tires ripping up the roads. It has been half a decade at least since one could hear the nighttime clip-clop of horseshoes on cobble and the chirping of crickets. In the last six months, young ladies and lordlings—some of them the very children of our readers!—have taken to racing each other through some of our best-known streets. The betting and exchange of boxings began not long after, and the youths began paying gangs of street urchins to deliberately lead the constables away from these so-called street races at predetermined times.

Hardest hit is the 3rd Octant with its slurry of parallel roads and long straightaways, and in a little under a month young Lady Carmine Feltry will be opening a motor-cars only circuit at the old fairgrounds abutting the Irongate River.

(Continued on Back.)



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Reckless Roughian Apprehends, Kills Marksman

A year has passed since the Fourth Octant Constabulary’s unpopular Decision to deputize the controversial former Roughs lawman Lord Waxillium Ladrian, and the Octant continues to run from a long List of Embarrassments the man has caused.

Foremost are Waxillium “Wax” Ladrian’s reckless Efforts to apprehend the notorious Marksman, who stole from institutions essential to the Commerce of our Grand City and took the life of an Innocent Child.

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(Continued on Back.)

11

Falling felt natural to a Coinshot. That sudden moment of acceleration, gut lurching but spirit leaping. The rush of wind. The chill of mist on the skin.

He opened his eyes to spinning white upon black, mist dancing about him, inviting, eager. All Allomancers shared a bond with the mists, but the other types never knew the thrill of jumping through them. Of nearly becoming one with them. During moments like this, Wax understood the Ascendant Warrior. Vin—they rarely called her by name. Her title, like those of the other Preservers, was used to show reverence.

The Historica, a section of the Words of Founding, said she had melded with the mists. She had taken them upon herself, becoming their guardian as they became her essence. As the Survivor watched over all who struggled, Vin watched over those in the night. Sometimes he felt he could see her form in their patterns: slight of frame, short hair splayed out as she moved, mistcloak fluttering behind her.

It was a fancy, wasn't it?

Wax fired Vindication, slamming a bullet into the ground and Pushing on it to stop his descent. He hit the street in front of the building lobby, going down on one knee. Nearby, some hopefuls still waited to be allowed into the party.

“Where?” Wax demanded, looking at them. “Someone fell before me. Where did he go?”

I haven’t even murdered your father yet.…

Rusts. Could she mean Steris’s father, his soon to be father-in-law?

“There … there was nobody,” said a man in a black suit. “Just that.” He pointed to a smashed chair.

In the distance, a motorcar roared to life. It tore away with a frantic sound.

Bleeder might be a Coinshot now, Wax thought, running toward the sound, hoping it was her. *But she wouldn’t need a motorcar if that were the case.* Maybe she’d chosen the Feruchemical power to change her weight, so she could drift down on the wind.

Wax launched himself upward, watching the steel lines for movement. In the mists ordinary vision was of limited use, but steelsight’s blue lines pierced the mists like arrows. He could easily make out the motorcar speeding away, but he didn’t know for certain Bleeder was in it. He took a moment to watch the movements of other vehicles nearby. A carriage pulled to a stop one street away. He could tell from the way the lines quivered—those would be the metal fittings on the horse’s harness. People on foot walked slowly along Tindwyl Promenade. Nothing suspicious.

Decision made, he Pushed against some streetlamps, sending himself after the speeding motorcar. He bounded from lamp to lamp, then launched himself over the top of a building as the motor turned a corner. Wax crested the building in a rush of swirling mists, passing only a few feet over the top. A group of young boys playing on the roof watched him pass with dropped jaws. Wax landed on the far edge of the rooftop, mistcoat tassels spraying forward around him, then leaped down as the motor passed below.

This, he thought, *will not work out as well as you hoped, Bleeder.*

Wax increased his weight, then Pushed on the motor from above.

He didn’t crush the person inside—he couldn’t be absolutely sure he had the right quarry. His carefully pressed weight did pop the wheels like tomatoes, then squashed the roof down just enough to bend the metal doors in their housings. Even if Bleeder had access to enhanced speed, she wouldn’t be getting out through those doors.

Wax landed beside the motorcar, Vindication out and pointed through the window at a confused man wearing a cabbie’s hat. Motorcar cabbies? When had that started happening?

“He got out!” the cabbie said. “Two streets back. Told me to keep driving; didn’t even let me stop as he jumped!”

Wax kept perfectly still, gun right at the cabbie’s forehead. It could be Bleeder. She could change faces.

“P-please…” the cabbie said, crying. “I…”

Damn it! Wax didn’t know enough. *Harmony. Is it him?*

He was returned a vague sense of uncertainty. Harmony didn’t know.

Wax growled, but lifted his gun away from the frightened driver, trusting his gut. “Where did you let him off?”

“Tage Street.”

“Go to the Fourth Octant precinct station,” Wax said. “Wait for me, or constables I send. We’ll likely have questions for you. Once I’m satisfied, we’ll buy you a new motor.”

Wax Pushed himself into the air to the corner of Tage and Guillem, which put him at the edge of a maze of industrial alleyways linking warehouses with the docks where canal boats unloaded. Steelsight on and Pushing bubble up, he crept through the mists, but didn’t have much hope. He’d have a devil of a time finding one man alone here, in the dark.

All Bleeder had to do was pick one place and hide there. Many criminals didn’t make the wise choice in this situation, however. It was hard to remain perfectly still, not moving any metal, while an Allomancer prowled about looking for you.

Wax persisted, walking down a dark alleyway, checking the rope at his waist, making sure he could unwind it quickly in case Bleeder was a Coinshot or a Lurcher and he needed to dump his metals. Soon the mists filling in behind him made him feel as if he were in an endless corridor, vanishing into nothingness in both directions. Above as well, only dark, swirling mists. Wax stopped in an empty intersection, silent warehouses like leviathans slumbering in the deep on all four corners, only one of which held a streetlight. He looked about with steelsight, waiting, counting heartbeats.

Nothing.

Either the cabbie had been Bleeder in disguise, or Wax’s prey had slipped away. Wax sighed, lowering his gun.

One of the large warehouse doors fell outward with a crash, revealing a dozen men. Wax felt a sweeping wave of relief. He hadn’t lost his quarry—he’d simply been led into a trap!

Wait.

Damn, Wax thought, leveling Vindication and pulling his Sterrion from his hip. He Pushed on the men in the same movement, which flung him backward toward the cover of a half-finished building.

Unfortunately, the men opened fire before he arrived. Wax's steel bubble deflected a number of the shots, bending them away to cut empty air. The bullets trailed streaks in the mist. One, however, clipped him on the arm.

Wax gasped as his Push slammed him against an incomplete wall. He fired a shot into the ground, then Pushed on it, backflipping himself over the brick wall and behind cover.

Bullets continued to pelt the bricks as Wax dropped a gun and pressed his left hand to the underside of his right upper arm with a flare of pain and blood. The men on the other side of the wall kept firing, and some of the bullets didn't have blue lines. Aluminum bullets. Bleeder was far better funded than Wax had expected.

Why keep firing so rabidly? Were they trying to bring the wall down with the force of their shots? *No. They're trying to hold my attention so I can be flanked.*

Wax grabbed Vindication, holding his bleeding arm as he raised it—it *hurt*—just as several shadows wearing no metal ducked into the other side of the building site. Wax plugged the first one in the head, then dropped the second with a shot to the neck. Three others knelt, raising crossbows.

Something pulled one of them into the shadows. Wax faintly heard an *urk* of pain just before he fired at the second. He turned his gun toward the third to find it slumping down, something stuck into its head. A knife?

"Wayne?" Wax asked, hurriedly reloading Vindication with bloody fingers.

"Not exactly," a feminine voice said. A tall figure crawled through the mists, moving over a pile of bricks to reach him. As she drew closer, he could make out large eyes, jet hair, and a sleekly elegant gown—that was now missing the bottom half, below the knees. The woman from the party, the one who had tried flirting with him.

Wax flipped Vindication, reloaded, up in a smooth motion, pointing it at the woman's head. The bullets outside stopped pounding the wall. The silence was far more ominous.

"Oh please," the woman said, pulling up beside the wall with him. "Why would I save you if I were an enemy?"

Because you could be Bleeder, Wax thought. Anyone could.

"Um … you're hurt," the woman said. "How bad is that? Because we should *really* start running right now. They're going to come charging in here shortly."

Damn. Not much choice. Trust her and potentially die, or not trust her and almost certainly die.

"Come here," Wax said, grabbing the woman and pulling her close. He pointed Vindication at the ground.

"They have snipers," she said. "On five roofs, watching for you to Push into the mists. Aluminum bullets."

"How do you know?"

"Overheard those fellows with the bows whispering as they moved around to come get you."

Wax growled. "Who are you?" he said through gritted teeth.

"Does it matter right now?"

"No."

"Can you run?"

"Yes. It's not as bad as it looks." Wax took off, the woman running at his side. The wound hurt like hell, but there was something about the mists.… He felt stronger in them. It shouldn't be so—he was no Pewterarm—but there it was.

In truth, getting shot was bad, but not as bad as people often made it out to be. This shot had gone through the skin and muscle under his arm, making it difficult to raise, but he wouldn't bleed out. Most bullets wouldn't actually stop a man; psychologically, the panic of being shot did the most harm.

The two of them charged out the back side of the building, past the man with a knife in his head. Behind them shouts rose in the mist, and a few of the ambushers trying to get into the building took wild shots.

The woman ran well despite being in a gown. Yes, she'd ripped off the bottom half, but she still seemed to run too easily, without seeming to break a sweat or breathe deeply.

Blue lines. Ahead.

Wax grabbed Milan by the arm, yanking her to the side into an alleyway as a group of four men burst out of a cross street, leveling guns.

"Rusts!" Wax said, peeking around the corner. This short alleyway ended at a wall. The thugs had him surrounded.

"How many men does Bleeder have?" Wax muttered with another curse, under his breath.

"These can't be Bleeder's men," Milan said. "How would she have recruited such an army? In the past she's always worked on her own."

Wax looked at her sharply. How much did she know about all this?

"We're going to have to fight," Milan said as shouts sounded from behind them. She reached to her chest, where her gown exposed considerable cleavage.

Waxillium had seen some odd things in his life. He'd visited koloss camps in the Roughs, even been invited to join their numbers. He'd met and spoken with God himself and had received a personal gift from Death. That did not prepare him for the sight of a pretty young woman's chest turning nearly transparent, one of the breasts splitting and offering up the hilt of a small handgun.

She grabbed it and pulled it out. "So convenient," she noted. "You can store all sorts of things in those."

"Who *are* you?"

"MeLaan," she said, rising and holding her gun in two hands. The pronunciation was slightly different this time when she said her name. "The Father promised you help. I'm it."

A Faceless Immortal. As soon as she stopped speaking, he heard a rustling in his mind. *You can trust this one.* Harmony's voice, accompanied by a sense of endlessness, a vision like he'd seen before. It was as good a confirmation as he could get that this wasn't Bleeder.

Wax narrowed his eyes at the woman anyway. "Wait. I think I know you."

She grinned. "We've met once before tonight. I'm charmed you remember. You want the ones in the back or the front?"

At least a dozen chasing them. Four ahead. He had to trust someone, sometime. "I'll take the ones behind."

"Such a gentleman," she said. "By the way, technically I'm not supposed to kill people. I … uh … think I already broke that rule tonight. If we happen to survive, please don't tell TenSoon that I murdered a bunch of people again. It upsets him."

"Sure. I can do that."

She grinned—whoever she was, this side of her was completely different from what she'd displayed previously. "Say when to go."

Wax peeked around the corner. Dark figures moved in the mist behind them, coming up on their position. If she was right, and this wasn't Bleeder, then who …

Aluminum bullets. Snipers to watch for his escape.

It was his uncle. Somehow Wax had been played. Oh, Harmony … If Bleeder and the Set were working together …

He tossed a bullet casing to the side, against the wall to his right, and held it in place with a light Allomantic push. He flexed his wounded arm, then raised both guns. "Go."

Wax didn't wait to see what MeLaan did. He Pushed against the casing, throwing himself out into the street, churning the mist. Men fired, and Wax increased his weight, then *Pushed* with a sweeping blast of Allomantic power. Some weapons were thrown backward, and some bullets stopped in the air. Men grunted as his Push sent them away.

Two men's weapons weren't affected by the Push. Wax shot them first. They fell, and he didn't give the other men time to go for the aluminum guns. He decreased his weight greatly and Pushed against the men behind him, hoping that the shove helped MeLaan.

His Push sent him into the middle of the men he was fighting. He landed, kicking one of the aluminum guns away into the mists, then lowered Vindication and drilled a thug in the head, just at the ear. The cracks of his gunfire rang in the night.

Wax kept firing, dropping the men around him as he spun through the mists. Some came at him with dueling canes while others fell back with bows. No Allomancers that he'd spotted. In the night, he could finally prove the worth of the mistcoat. As he dodged between the thugs—kicking the other aluminum gun away—the tassels on his coat spun in the air, seeming to meld with the mists. Men attacked where he had been, the tassels confusing them as they churned the fog.

He twisted between two of the thugs and raised a gun to either side and fired, sending them to the ground. Then he turned and leveled both weapons at the man who had been sneaking up on him.

Both out, I believe. He pulled the triggers anyway. The weapons clicked.

The terrified man stumbled back, then paused. "He's out! Move! He's defenseless!" The man charged forward.

Wax dropped the guns.

Why, exactly, would they assume that I need guns to be dangerous?

He reached into his coat and undid the rope at his waist. He pulled it free, draping the rope from his fingers. Ranette's hook clinked as it hit the ground.

The man in front of him hesitated at the sound, dueling cane held nervously.

"This," Wax said, "is how it used to be done."

He yanked the rope, whipping the metal end into the air, then Pushed the spike at the man's chest, letting the rope move through his fingers to give it more slack. It hit, cracking ribs, and Wax yanked the rope back, holding it on a tight leash and spinning the hook through the air as he turned. He Pushed again, slamming the metal into the man raising a bow.

Wax twisted and knelt, whipping the rope around. It spun before him in a grand arc, stirring the mist as he gave the rope more slack, then Pushed it, slamming the spike-hook past one man and into another's chest. Wax yanked the spike-hook back, catching the other man on the thigh, tripping him as he came forward with a dueling cane.

Wax caught the hook in one hand and turned, Pushing the hook forward into the shoulder of an ambusher. Wax ripped it free with a yank, then Pushed it directly back into the man's face.

One more, he thought. Wax whirled, pulling the hook back into his hand, searching.

The last man scrambled for something on the ground. He looked up, raising one of the fallen aluminum guns. "The Set sends its regards, law—"

He cut off as a shadow behind him rammed a knife into his back.

"Here's a tip, kid," MeLaan said. "Save the wisecracks until your foe is dead. Like this. See how easy it is?" She kicked the corpse in the face.

Wax looked around at the fallen and groaning men. He held the rope tightly. Those sharpshooters on the roofs might reposition soon and start firing. "We need to move fast. I think Bleeder is going after Lord Harms, my betrothed's father."

"Damn," MeLaan said. "You want to try to climb up and go after those sharpshooters?"

"No time," Wax whispered. He pointed down the street. "You go that way; I'll go the other way. If you get out, head back to the Counselor's Cup, a tavern over on Edden Way. I'll meet you there after I go for Lord Harms. If I or someone I send talks to you, first say the words 'all yellow pants.'"

"Sure thing."

"Good luck."

“I’m not the one who needs help, lawman,” MeLaan said. “*I’m* basically bulletproof.” She gave him a kind of mock salute, then took off down the street, charging through the mists.

Wax recovered Vindication, but didn’t holster her. Instead, he grabbed one of the corpses nearby and lugged it up onto his shoulder, stuffing bullets into its pocket. Then he pulled off his gunbelt. He didn’t know if those sharpshooters might be Metalborn, set to watch for lines of metal in the mists.

Just in case, he heaved the corpse overhead and Pushed, lobbing it upward through the mists. Then he Pushed on his gunbelt, sending it flying ahead of him down the street.

Finally he ran, chasing after the gunbelt and using Allomancy to knock it up and forward again as it started to fall. A gunshot broke the night, but he couldn’t pinpoint its origin. He didn’t know if the sharpshooter was trying to hit the corpse, his gunbelt, or him. Another shot followed.

He burst out of the alley, snatched his gunbelt off the ground, then leaped, soaring over the walkway and coming down in the frigid blackness of the canal. Dark water surrounded him, the guns towing him down as his mistcoat billowed outward.

He kicked downward, seeking the floor of the canal. And then, still submerged, he Pushed on the mooring rings on either side of the canal behind him. Most people, even seasoned gunmen, underestimated the stopping power of a good foot of water. Wax surged through the canal like a fish swimming downstream, continuing to Push on new mooring rings as they passed, staying centered in the canal and remaining submerged. He scraped the bottom of a boat overhead, but kept Pushing, praying he wouldn’t ram himself into anything in the depths.

By the time his breath ran out, he must have traveled a number of blocks. He burst out of the water and, coughing, crawled to the side of the canal and heaved himself out onto the walkway. He stumbled to his feet. Nobody shot him, which was a good sign.

He paused just long enough to catch his breath and roughly bind his arm, then took to the skies, heading for the Harms mansion.

12

“That’s good,” Wayne said, notepad out. “You’re sure that fellow wasn’t acting strange, then? Nothing odd?”

The serving woman shook her head, sitting with her arms wrapped around herself. They’d finally managed to get down from the top floor, following the panicked exodus by the rich types. The governor was surrounded by a bubble of guards over to Wayne’s left, and a set of strong electric lanterns illuminated the misty night.

The green in front of the skyscraper felt right empty, now that so many people had left. He figured that would soon change, when Marasi returned with some more constables. She’d run off to fetch them, and give a report. That meant Wayne was the sole officer of lawkeepin’ in the vicinity. A frightening thought.

“I’ve got one more question for you,” Wayne said to the woman.

“Yes, officer?” she asked.

“Where’d you get those shoes?”

The woman blinked, then looked down. “Um … My shoes?”

"Yeah, your shoes," Wayne said. "Look plenty comfortable, they do. Can never have too many pairs of black pumps. They go with *rusting* everything."

She looked back at him. "You're a man."

"Sure am," Wayne said. "Checked last time I pissed. The shoes?"

"Rousseau's," she said. "Third Octant, on Yomen Street." She paused. "They were on sale last week."

"Damn!" Wayne said. "That's beautiful. Thanks. You're free to go."

She gave him that look that people seemed to give only to Wayne, the one he hadn't quite figured. Ah well. He wrote down the name of the shop. If he had to wear those awful pumps from his disguise box *one* more time, he'd probably go insane.

He popped a ball of gum into his mouth and wandered over toward the pile of guards, going over his notes. *That server up above,* he thought, tapping his pad with his pencil, *was not the kandra.* Wayne had talked to a dozen of the staff. All knew the fellow and said he hadn't been acting strange at all. But none of them liked him. He was a screwup, and none were surprised that he'd turned out to be rotten.

An amateur might think that picking the new guy made for a good disguise, but this Bleeder, she could be *anyone*. Why would she pick the low man on the list, someone who had only joined the staff a few weeks back? Sure, being new would give you an excuse to not know people's names, but by reports, this fellow hadn't forgotten anyone's name tonight. And picking a habitual klutz with a bad reputation would just lead to everyone watching over your shoulder. A terrible choice for an imitator.

That guy had been some other kind of mole. He shook his head.

"Where's Drim?" he asked the guards. "I wanna show him what I've got."

The guard leaned over, looking at Wayne's notepad. "All that's on there is a bunch of scribbles."

"It's for show," Wayne said. "Makes people talk more if they think you're writin' stuff down. Dunno why. I sure wouldn't want anyone rememberin' the slag I say.…" He hesitated, then shoved aside the guard, looking into the middle of the pile. Drim wasn't there, and neither was the governor.

"What'd you do with him!" Wayne said, turning on the others. A smug group of bastards, they were.

"It was best everyone thought he was still here," the guard said. "In truth, he and Drim headed to a secure location ages ago. If we fooled you, then hopefully we fooled the assassin."

"Fooled … I'm supposed to be protectin' the guy!"

"Well, you're doing a rusting good job of that, mate, ain'tcha," the guard said, then smirked.

So Wayne did the only reasonable thing. He spat out his gum, then decked the fellow.

* * *

Wax rarely appreciated the city as much as he did when he needed to get somewhere quickly.

To the eyes of a man burning steel, Elendel was alight and full of motion, even while shadowed by darkness and mist. Metal. In some ways, that was the true mark of mankind. Man tamed the stones, the bones of the earth below. Man tamed the fire, that ephemeral, consuming soul of life. And combining the two, he drew forth the marrow of the rocks themselves, then made molten tools.

Wax passed among the skyscrapers like a whisper, the motion drying his clothing. He became just another current in the mists, and moving with him in radial spokes was a majestic network of blue lines—like a million outstretched fingers pointing the way to anchors he could use along his path. When even a galloping horse was too slow, Wax had steel. It burned in him, returning to the fire that gave it shape.

From it he drew power. Sometimes that wasn't enough.

But this night, he exploded through the lit upper windows of the Harms dwelling, rolling and coming up with guns leveled. Lord Harms swiveled in the chair of his writing desk, knocking over his pot of ink. The red-faced older man had a comfortable paunch, an easy manner, and a pair of mustaches that were in competition with his jowls to see which could droop farthest toward the floor. Upon seeing Wax, he started, then scrambled to reach into his desk drawer.

Wax scanned the room. Nobody else there. No enemies in the corners, no moving bits of metal in closets or the bedroom. He'd arrived in time. Wax let out a sigh of relief, standing up as Lord Harms finally got his desk drawer open. The man whipped out a pistol, one of the modern semiautos that were popular with the constables. Harms leaped to his feet and rushed over to Wax, holding his gun in two hands.

"Where are they!" Harms exclaimed. "We can take them, eh, old boy?"

“You have a gun,” Wax said.

“Yes indeed, yes indeed. After what happened last year, I realized that a man has to be armed. What’s the emergency? I’ll have your back!”

Wax carefully tipped the point of Lord Harms’s gun downward, just in case a bullet was chambered—because, fortunately, the man hadn’t locked a magazine into the pistol. Wax glanced behind at the windows. He’d flung them open with a Push as he approached, but they were meant to open outward, *not* inward. He’d ripped both right off their hinges, toppling one while the other hung by its corner. It finally gave way, crashing to the floor, cracking the glass inside the wooden frame.

Mist poured in through the opening, flooding the floor. Where was Bleeder? In the house somewhere? Impersonating a maid? A neighbor? A constable passing on the street?

Standing in the room with him?

“Jackstom,” Wax said, looking to Lord Harms, “do you remember when you first met me, and Wayne was pretending to be my butler?”

Harms frowned. “You mean your uncle?”

Good, Wax thought. An impostor wouldn’t know that, would she? Rusts … He’d have to suspect everyone.

“You’re in danger,” Wax said, sliding his guns into their hip holsters. His suit was basically ruined from the swim in the canal, and he’d tossed aside his cravat, but the sturdy mistcoat had seen far worse than this. “I’m getting you out of here.”

“But…” Lord Harms trailed off, face blanching. “My daughter?”

As if he had only one.

“Steris is fine,” Wax said. “Wayne is watching her. Let’s go.”

The problem was, go where? Wax had a hundred places he could take Harms, but Bleeder could be lurking at any of them. The odds were certainly in Wax’s favor, and yet …

Bleeder is ancient, Harmony had said. *Older than the destruction of the world. She is crafty, careful, and brilliant.… She spent centuries studying human behavior.*

Any option Wax chose could be the very one Bleeder had predicted he would choose. How did you outthink something so old, so knowledgeable?

The solution seemed easy. You didn’t try.

* * *

Steris left ZoBell Tower to find Wayne sitting across the street from a huddle of bruised and obviously angry men. Wayne was eating a sandwich.

"Oh, Wayne," she said, looking from the hostile, wounded men and back to him. "Those are the governor's guards. He's going to need them tonight."

"'s not my fault," Wayne said. "They was bein' unaccommodating." He took a bite of his sandwich.

She sighed, settling down beside him and looking up through the mists toward the tower. She could make out the lights on various floors glowing like phantoms above, leading all the way up to the very top.

"This is how it's going to be, with him, isn't it?" she asked. "Always being left behind in the middle of something? Always *half* feeling as if I'm part of his life?"

Wayne shrugged. "You could do the noble thing, Steris. Give up on the whole marriage. Let him loose to find someone he actually likes."

"And my family's investment in him and his house?"

"Well, I know this here is revolutionary words, Steris, but you can loan a chap money *without* him havin' to jump you in appreciation, if you know my meanin'."

Good *Harmony* he could be shockingly unmannered. He wasn't like this to others. Oh, he was crass and whimsical, but rarely blatantly rude. He saved that for her. Was he expecting her to fight back, prove herself somehow? She'd never been able to figure this man out. Preparing what to say to him only seemed to make him more vulgar.

"Did he say where he was going?" she said, trying to remain polite.

"Nah," Wayne said, taking a bite of his sandwich. "He's chasin' Bleeder down. Means he could have gone anywhere, and so tryin' to find him is useless. He'll come back for me when he can. If I leave, I'll just end up missing him."

"I see." She settled back, crossing her feet on the curb and staring up at those lights. "Do you hate me because of what I represent, Wayne? The responsibilities that called him back?"

"I don't hate you," Wayne said. "I find you repulsive. That there is an important distinction, it is."

"But—"

Wayne stood up. He shoved the rest of the sandwich into his mouth.

Then he walked over to the guards that were glaring at him and sat down. The implication was obvious.

I'd rather be here.

Steris closed her eyes, squeezing them shut, and tried to pretend she was someone other than herself for a time. Eventually, sounding bells announced the arrival of constable carriages. She stood up and composed herself, relieved when Marasi exited one of them and hurried over.

"Waxillium?" she asked.

Steris shook her head.

"Get in," Marasi said, pointing to one of the carriages. "I'm sending you someplace safe."

"I think the danger has passed here," Steris said. "Unless Wayne is picking fights again."

"No," Marasi said. "The danger has only just started."

Something in the younger woman's tone gave Steris pause. Other constables weren't piling out of the carriages. In fact, they seemed to be waiting for Marasi. They weren't coming here to investigate the man Waxillium had chased off.

"Something's happened, hasn't it?" Steris asked.

"Yeah," Marasi said. "Wayne, get over here! We've got work to do."

* * *

Wax stashed Lord Harms at the very top of Feder Tower. He'd chosen its location on the city map by picking random numbers; hopefully Bleeder wouldn't be able to outthink a plan with no thought involved. Harms had instructions to lie low, hide in the darkness and stay quiet. Even if Bleeder could Steelpush and search in the night, the chance of her happening upon Harms was ridiculously low verging on impossible. That didn't stop Wax from worrying. Steris's father was a silly man, but good-natured and amiable.

It was the best Wax could do, as he needed to locate the governor. That hunt took Wax longer than he'd have assumed, which was actually a good thing. It meant that Drim, despite his dislike of Wax, was doing his job properly. Best Wax could determine, they had sent at least three unmarked carriages away from ZoBell Tower: two decoys, and one with the governor inside. He spotted one on Stanton Way, and dismissed it. Too obvious, with the guards riding on top. Guessing that another had gone east, he found it driving around in a circle in the Third Octant, also trying to draw attention. It was moving too slowly.

Besides, the governor wouldn't go that way. Innate was a fighter. He wouldn't want to be seen hiding. So it was that Wax found himself perched on the top of a building near Hammond Promenade, a few streets from Innate's own mansion. He'd return here, eschewing safehouses in the city. He'd want to be in his center of power and authority.

The mists seemed to glow here in the city, lit by a thousand lights—an increasing number of them electric. It took long enough for the carriage to arrive that Wax was starting to second-guess himself. But arrive it did: a tall-topped enclosed coach with red curtains. Yes, it was quite nondescript. The horses, however, were from the governor's prized breeding stock. Just like the two decoys.

Wax shook his head as he jumped and Pushed his way to the top of the stone archway outside the First Insurance Bank. The coach moved at a fair clip and held no obvious guards. They must have taken a very roundabout way to take so long to reach here. Wax leaped off the bank's facade and Pushed on a streetlight, hurling himself after the governor's coach. He landed on its top and nodded to the surprised coachman, then swung down alongside the vehicle and knocked on the coach's door, hanging by one arm above the blur of cobblestones beneath. They were certainly running the animals hard.

After a few moments the window shade opened, revealing Drim's surprised face. "Ladrian?" he said. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Being polite," Wax said. "May I come in?"

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I *stop* being polite."

Drim sneered, but glanced to the side, where the governor rode with his hat in his lap. The man nodded, and Drim sighed and turned back to the door.

They didn't stop the carriage. So Wax had to let go, drop a bullet casing, and Push back to the carriage as Drim opened the door. He grabbed it by the handle, Pushing off a passing light, and ducked into the vehicle, ending up seated opposite Drim and the governor.

Drim would be a perfect person to imitate. As would the carriage driver, as would basically anyone with access to the governor, including his wife and family.

"Lord Ladrian," Innate said with a sigh. "Breaking up the party wasn't enough for you? You have to harass me on the way home from it as well?"

Wax shrugged, then moved to climb back *out* of the carriage. He had the door half open before Innate, sputtering, snapped, “What are you doing now, you fool?”

“Leaving,” Wax said. “There are thousands of places I could be right now, most of them more pleasant.” He hesitated, then pulled out one of his Sterrions and flipped it in his hand, holding it grip-first to the governor. “Here.”

The governor’s eyes bulged. “Why would I need a gun? I have bodyguards.”

“So did your brother,” Wax said. “Take it. I’ll feel guilty when you get shot, if I haven’t done *something*.”

“… Shot?” Innate blanched. “My brother was killed because of his flirtations with the underbelly of Elendel. They wouldn’t dare touch me.”

“I’m sure they wouldn’t,” Wax said, leaning out the door, then hesitated again and looked back in. “You know how to spot a kandra, right, Drim?”

“A what?” the thick-necked bodyguard said.

“Those are myths,” Lord Innate said.

“Are they?” Wax said. “Then the one I met tonight must have been lying. Not sure how she made her skin transparent though. Oh well. Guess you have it in hand.”

“You mean to tell me,” Innate said, stopping Wax with a touch before he could move out the door again, “that one of the *Faceless Immortals* was at my party tonight?”

“Two, actually,” Wax said. “One came to help. I would introduce you, have her prove her nature to you, but it does seem that your mind is made up. The other one at the party was the person who killed your brother. You sure you don’t want a gun? No? All right, I’ll just be—”

“You’ve made your point, Lord Waxillium,” Innate said, sour-faced. He settled back beside the carriage’s lantern, which burned gas with a proper light.

“My lord,” Drim said, looking to Innate. “This is stupid. The Faceless Immortals? Every second person claims to have met one, just to get their stories in the broadsheets! You’re not really considering these claims, are you?”

Innate studied Wax.

“He is,” Wax said. “Because he knows *something* strange happened to his brother. Killed in his saferoom, guards murdered from behind by someone they trusted—and Winsting Innate took his security *very* seriously. More seriously than you do, I'd suspect, Mister Governor."

"You can introduce me to one of the creatures?" Innate asked. "Offer me proof of their existence?"

"Yes."

"But why," Drim said, "would one of Harmony's own servants kill Lord Winsting?"

"The kandra has gone insane," Wax said softly. "We don't know her motives yet, but she does seem to want you dead, Mister Governor. So my job is to keep you alive."

"What do we do?" Innate asked. "How do we prepare?"

"Well," Wax said, "first I take over your security."

"Like hell you do!" Drim said.

"You taking over is impossible," Innate agreed. "Drim has served me well for years. He … Where are you going?"

Wax turned back from the door. "There's a play I wanted to see tonight," he said, gesturing. "Figured I'd go catch the tail end while you two discuss this."

"And if this creature comes for me while you're gone?" Innate demanded.

"I'm sure your head of security can deal with it," Wax said. "He knew the kandra were at the party tonight, didn't he? And he most certainly didn't miss Wayne slipping in wearing a disguise. And—"

"You may review my security protocols," Innate said with a sigh. "And offer advice."

"Fine," Wax said, pulling the door closed as the carriage turned a corner and approached the governor's mansion. "But you have to agree to one thing right now. I'm going to give you both a passphrase, and I want you both to vow not to share it with *anyone*. Not even each other or Lady Innate. You'll also give me a passphrase. When we meet, we'll exchange them in a whisper, which will prove that none of us have been replaced."

"You honestly think I wouldn't know my own wife?" Innate asked tiredly.

"I'm sure you would," Wax said, softening his tone. "But this is a requirement of my aid, and you must humor me. It will put my mind at ease."

The family was most dangerous. Bleeder had sounded so confident, as if she had the governor in hand, which made Wax think the creature had already gotten to one of the family. Lady Innate hadn't been at the party, but

Harmony had said Bleeder could swap bodies whenever she wished. Rust and Ruin, what an awful spot to be in. Bleeder could have killed a niece or nephew, a toddler even, and be planning to imitate one of them to get to the governor. In the Historica, kandra imitated animals. The house pets could secretly be assassins.

Wax glanced at the governor, who looked profoundly disturbed, his hands clasped, eyes staring as if to see a thousand miles. The implications of it were sinking in. Innate wasn't an idiot. Just an egotist and possibly a crook.

The carriage pulled up to the mansion and Drim climbed out. As Wax followed, the governor took him by the arm. "I will want to see this proof of yours, Roughian."

"I'll arrange a meeting tomorrow."

"Tonight."

Wax nodded.

"If this is true," the governor said, still holding his arm, "what do we do? I've read the Words of Founding. I know what the Immortals were capable of. Ruin … this creature could be anyone. Passphrases won't be enough. Not nearly."

"They won't," Wax admitted. "Sir, the thing has access to the Metallic Arts too. At any time, she could be anything from a Pulser to an Archivist. Though she can only carry one at a time without risking loss of control, she can swap the powers out at will."

"Great *Harmony*," the governor whispered. "How do you stop something like that?"

"Frankly, I don't know. You should probably already be dead."

"Why am I not?" the governor asked, waving back Drim, who had peeked in to check on them. "This creature could have killed me as easily as she did my brother."

"She seems to have some kind of agenda. Bigger than you. She might not want to bring you down until doing so topples the city government entirely." Wax hesitated, then leaned closer. "Sir, you might want to leave Elendel."

"Leave?" Innate said. "Have you *seen* what is going on in the city?"

Wax nodded. "I—"

"Labor strikes," Innate continued as if he hadn't heard Wax. "Food prices skyrocketing. Too many men from one job out of work, too many from another demanding to be treated better. Rusts, there are practically riots in the streets, man! And the *scandal*. I can't leave. My career would be over."

“Better than your life being over.”

The governor glanced at him. He didn’t seem to see it that way. “Leaving is impossible,” Innate reiterated. “It would look like I’m abandoning the people—they’d think the scandal drove me into hiding. I’d be perceived as a coward. No. Impossible. I will send Lady Innate to safety, as well as the children. I must stay and *you* must deal with this thing, whatever it is. Stop it before it can go any further.”

“I’ll try,” Wax said, leaning in. “Give me a passphrase to authenticate myself. Something memorable, but nonsensical.”

“‘Leavening on sand.’”

“Good. Mine for you is ‘bones without soup.’ You have a saferoom?”

“Yes,” Innate said. “In the bottom of the mansion, beneath the sitting room.”

“Set up in there,” Wax said, climbing out of the carriage, “and if you lock the door, *don’t* let anyone in until I arrive, and can give you the passphrase.”

Soon after stepping down, Wax found himself pulling out Vindication.

He’d leveled the gun before he registered what had set him off. Cries of alarm, but not pain. A servant hastened out of the governor’s mansion, passing pillars on the front lit stark white, like a line of femurs.

“My lord governor!” the woman cried. “We’ve had a telenote through the wire; something has happened. You’re going to need to prepare a response!”

“What is it?” Wax demanded as the governor climbed from the carriage.

The servant hesitated, eyes widening at Wax’s gun. She wore a sharp black suit, skirt to the ankles, red scarf at the neck. A steward, or perhaps one of the governor’s advisors.

“I’m a constable,” Wax said. “What is the emergency?”

“A murder,” she said.

Harmony, no … “Not Lord Harms. Please tell me!” Had he left the man to be killed, in his haste to get to the governor?

“Lord who?” the woman asked. “It wasn’t a nobleman at all, constable.” She glanced at Drim, who nodded—Wax could be trusted. She looked back to Wax. “It was Father Bin. The priest.”

* * *

Marasi stared up at the corpse, which had been nailed to the wall like an old drapery. One spike through each eye. Blood painted the man’s cheeks and had soaked into the white ceremonial robes, forming a crimson vest. Almost like a Terris V. Blood stained the wall on either side of the corpse as well, smeared there by thrashing arms and fingers. Marasi shivered. The priest had been alive as this happened.

Though constables poked and prodded at the large nave of the church, Marasi felt alone, standing before that corpse and its steel eyes. Just her and the body, a disturbingly reverent scene. It reminded her of something out of the Historica, though she couldn't remember what.

Captain Aradel stepped up beside her. "I've had word of your sister," he said. "We've got her in one of our most secure safehouses."

"Thank you, sir."

"What do you make of it?" he asked, nodding toward the body.

"It's ghastly, sir. What exactly happened?"

"The conventicalists aren't being very helpful," he said. "I'm not sure if they're in shock, or if they see our intrusion here as offensive."

He gestured for her to go before him and they passed Wayne, who sat in one of the pews chewing gum and looking up at the body. Marasi and Aradel exited the domed nave and entered a small foyer where a row of ashen-faced people sat on some benches. They were conventicalists—those who worked in a Survivorist church aside from the priest.

A grey-haired woman sat at their head, wearing the formal dress of a church matron. She wiped her eyes, and several youths huddled against her, eyes down. Constable Reddi stood nearby; the lean man tucked his clipboard under his arm and saluted Aradel. Normally, this wasn't the sort of thing a constable-general would be involved in, but Aradel had been a detective for many years.

"Will you be handling the interrogation yourself, sir?" Reddi asked. The conventicalists stiffened visibly at the word "interrogation." Marasi could have smacked him for his tone.

"No," Aradel.

"Very good, sir," Reddi said, pulling his bow tie tight and taking out his clipboard. He stepped up to the conventicalists.

"Actually," Aradel said, "I was thinking we'd let Lieutenant Colms try."

Marasi felt a sharp spike of panic, which she smothered immediately. She wasn't afraid of a simple interrogation, particularly with amiable witnesses. But the way Aradel said it, so seriously, made her suddenly feel as if it were some type of test. Wonderful.

She took a deep breath and pushed past Reddi, who had lowered his clipboard and was eyeing her. The assembled group of eight people sat with slumped shoulders. How to best approach them? They'd described to a sketch artist what had happened, but details could separate Ruin from Preservation.

Marasi settled down on the bench between two of them. "My condolences on your loss," she said softly. "My apologies too. The constabulary has failed you this day."

"It's not your fault," the matron said, pulling one of the children tight. "Who could have anticipated … Holy Survivor, I knew those Pathians were a miscreant bunch. I always *knew* it. No rules? No precepts to guide their lives?"

"Chaos," a shaven-headed man said from the bench behind. "They want nothing but chaos."

"What happened?" Marasi said. "I've read the report, of course, but … rusts … I can't imagine…"

"We were waiting for evening celebration," the matron said. "The mists had put in quite the appearance! Must have been almost a thousand people in the dome for worship. And then he just sauntered up to the dais, that Pathian *mongrel*."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Course I did," the matron said. "It was that Larskpur; we see him at community functions all the time. People feel they have to invite a Pathian priest, as if to not show favoritism, though nobody wants them around."

Behind her, the underpriest nodded. "Little wretch of a man, barely fit his robes," he said. "Nothing ornate. Really just a smock. They don't even dress up to worship."

"He started talking to the crowd," the matron continued. "Like *he* was going to give the mistdawn sermon! Only it was vile stuff he spouted."

"Such as what?" Marasi asked.

"Blasphemy," the matron said. "But it shouldn't matter. Look here, constable. Why are you even talking to us? A *thousand* people saw him. Why are you treating *us* like we did something wrong? You should be off arresting that monster."

"We have people hunting for him," Marasi said, and rested her hand on the shoulder of one of the children; the little girl whimpered and clamped on to her arm. “And I promise you, we’ll catch and punish the one who did this. But every detail you can remember will help us put him away.”

The matron and the underpriest glanced at each other. But it was one of the others—a lanky altarman in his twenties—who spoke. “Larskpur said,” the man whispered, “that the Survivor was a false god. That Kelsier had tried, and failed, to help humankind. That his death hadn’t been about protecting us or Ascending, but about stupidity and bravado.”

“It’s what they’ve always thought,” the matron said, “but don’t say. Those Pathians … they claim to accept everyone, but if you push you can see the truth. They mock the Survivor.”

“They want chaos,” the underpriest repeated. “They hate that so many people look to the Survivor. They hate that we have standards. They have no meetings, no churches, no commandments.… The Path isn’t a religion, it’s a *platitude*.”

“It stunned us, I’ll tell you that,” the matron said. “I thought at first that Father Bin *must* have invited Larskpur to speak. Why else would he be so bold as to step up to the pulpit? I was so horrified by what he said that I didn’t notice the blood at first.”

“I did,” the underpriest said. “I thought he was wearing gloves. I stared at those fingers, waving, bright red. And then I noticed the drops that he was flicking across the floor and the pulpit as he gestured.”

They all were quiet for a moment. “There isn’t anything more to say,” the matron finally said. “Larskpur gestured one last time, and the back draping fell down. There he was, our blessed father, nailed there in a terrible parody of the Survivor’s Statemark. Poor Father Bin had been … hanging the whole time. Might have been still alive, bleeding and dying while we all listened to that blasphemy.”

Marasi doubted that. Though the priest had obviously struggled at first, the spikes would have ended that quickly. “Thank you,” she said to the distraught group. “You’ve been very helpful.” She carefully pried the little girl’s hands from her arm and passed her to the matron.

Marasi stood, walking to Aradel and Reddi, who stood on the other side of the room.

“What do you think?” Marasi asked softly.

“About the information,” Reddi said, “or your interrogation techniques?”

“Either.”

"That wasn't how I'd have done it," the short constable said. "But I suppose that you did put them at ease."

"They didn't offer much," Aradel said, rubbing at his chin.

"What did you expect?" Marasi asked. "Captain, this had to be the same person who killed Winsting."

"Don't jump to conclusions," Aradel said. "What would be the motive?"

"Can you explain this any other way?" Marasi said, gesturing toward the room with the dead priest. "A Pathian? Murdering? Sir, their priests are some of least aggressive people on the planet. I've seen toddlers more dangerous."

Aradel continued rubbing his chin. "Reddi," he said, "go get those conventicalists something to drink. They could use a warm mug right now, I'd suspect."

"Sir?" Reddi said, taken aback.

"You been spending so much time at the gun range you've gone deaf?" Aradel said. "Be about it, Captain. I need to talk to Constable Colms."

Reddi's glare at Marasi could have boiled water, but he moved off to do as ordered.

"Sir," Marasi said, watching him go, "I can't help noticing that you're determined to see the rest of the constables hate me."

"Nonsense," he said. "Just giving the boy a nudge. He's useless when he isn't trying to show off for me—those weeks when he thought he had the assistant's position sewn up were miserable. He's a better officer when he has somebody to compete with." He took Marasi by the shoulder and steered her away from the seated conventicalists. A junior corporal had just shown up with blankets and mugs of warm tea. Hopefully Reddi wouldn't be too put out at having that job stolen from him too.

"I," Aradel said, drawing her attention back to him, "can't fight mistwraiths and spirits in the night. I'm a watchman, not an exorcist."

"I understand that, sir," Marasi said. On their ride over here, she'd told him what Waxillium had said about Bleeder. She wasn't about to keep information like that from her superior. "But if the criminal is supernatural, what option do we have?"

"I don't know," Aradel said, "and that frustrates me to no end. I've got a city dry as a pile of autumn leaves, Lieutenant, and it's about to go up in flames. I don't have the manpower to hunt down a fallen immortal; I need to have constables on the streets trying to keep this city from consuming itself."

“Sir, what if the two are related?”

“The two murders?”

“The murders and the unrest, sir.” She closed her eyes, remembering the chapel with its dome and pews, and tried to imagine it as it had been earlier. Larskpur standing in front and waving his hands, horrified parishioners fleeing and bearing the story that the Pathian leader had murdered a Survivorist priest …

“Bleeder, or whoever is behind this, has distracted the government with a scandal,” Marasi said opening her eyes. “Now she strikes at one church leader in the guise of another? Sir, whatever her real motives are, she’s obviously trying to strain Elendel. She *wants* this city to break.”

“You might be ascribing too much to one person, Lieutenant.”

“Not just a person,” Marasi said. “A demigod. Sir, what started the worker strikes?”

“Hell if I know,” Aradel said, patting at his pocket and taking out his cigar case. He opened it and found only a little folded note. He grimaced and showed it to her. *There’s a banana in your drawer.* “Damn woman will be the death of me. Anyway, I suspect the strikes have been building for a while. Harmony knows I sympathize with the poor fools. Get paid like dirt while the house lords live in mansions and penthouses.”

“But why now?” Marasi asked. “It’s the food, right? Suddenly spiked prices, worry that even when the strikes end, there won’t be food to be bought?”

“That certainly hasn’t helped,” Aradel agreed. “Those floods are going to be a strain.”

“A broken dam. Did we investigate that properly?”

Aradel paused, little paper half folded to return to his pocket. “You think that could have been sabotage?”

“Could be worth checking,” Marasi said.

“Could be indeed,” Aradel said. “I’ll see if I can spare some men. But if you’re right, what’s this creature’s endgame?”

“General mayhem?” Marasi asked.

Aradel shook his head. “Maybe it’s different for mistwraiths, but men who do things like this, they do it to *prove* something. They want to show how clever they are, or they want to stop an injustice. Maybe she wants to bring someone down. Isn’t the governor a Pathian?”

“I think so.”

“So this murder tonight could be an attempt to discredit his religion.” Aradel nodded. “Kill his brother, expose a scandal, undermine his faith, cause riots during his tenure … Rusts, this could be about making sure that Innate doesn’t just die, he gets *stomped* to the *ground*.”

Marasi nodded slowly. “Sir. I … might have proof that the governor is corrupt.”

“What? What kind of proof?”

“Nothing definitive,” she said, blushing. “It has to do with his policies, and when he’s changed his mind on bills, when he’s voted irregularly following visits with certain key individuals. Sir, you said you hired me in part because of my ability to read statistics. I’ll show you what I have once it’s all arranged, but the story the governor’s record tells is of a man who is offering himself up for sale.”

Aradel ran a hand through his hair, red flecked with grey. “Harmony. Keep this quiet, Lieutenant. We’ll worry about it another time. Understand?”

“Yes, sir. And I agree.”

“But good work,” he noted, then jogged over to take crime scene reports. Marasi couldn’t help feeling a thrill that he’d listened to what she said, even when all she could offer was half explanations. At the same time, however, a disturbing thought struck her. What if *Aradel* was secretly the kandra, somehow? How much damage could Bleeder do if she had an entire octant’s constables under her thumb?

No. Aradel had been around people when the priest was murdered. Rusts … the creature would have Marasi jumping at shadows, wondering if everyone she met was a kandra. She went to get herself a cup of that tea, hoping it would help her banish the image in her head of poor Father Bin hung from the wall. She wasn’t halfway to the table with the flasks before the doors to the foyer slammed open and Waxillium strode in.

He trailed tassels like the curling mists, his powerful stride prompting lesser constables to scuttle out of his way. How was it that he could so fully encapsulate everything the constables *should* be, but weren’t? Noble without being pandering, thoughtful yet proactive, unyielding yet inquisitive.

Marasi smiled, then hurried after him. It wasn’t until they reached the chapel, with its large glass dome and the dead priest hanging on the far side, that she realized she’d forgotten entirely about getting tea. A headache still thumped inside her skull.

Aradel stood inside the nave, accompanied by two young constables. “Lord Ladrian,” he said, turning toward Waxillium. “We’ll have a report on the body ready for you in—”

“I’ll see for myself, constable,” Waxillium said. “Thank you.” He dropped a bullet casing and rose into the air, soaring over rows of pews beneath the dome to land on the dais.

Aradel sighed and muttered a curse under his breath, then turned to one of the corporals. “See that His Lordship gets whatever he needs. Maybe he can make something of this damn mess—assuming he doesn’t just shoot the place up instead.”

The young constable nodded, then ran to join Waxillium, who was saying something to Wayne, who had stepped up to join him. Whatever Waxillium said sent the shorter man scuttling out the doors on some errand.

The constable-general shook his head, a sour grimace on his lips.

“Sir?” Marasi said. “You’re upset with Lord Waxillium?”

Aradel started, as if he hadn’t seen—or hadn’t registered—her standing there. “Pay no heed, Lieutenant. His Lordship is a great resource to this department.”

“Sir, that has the sound of a practiced answer to it.”

“Good,” Aradel said, “because it took me a long time to learn to say it without cursing.”

“Could I have the non-practiced version?”

Aradel looked her over. “Let’s just say that it must be damn nice, Lieutenant, to have other people to clean up your messes for you.” He nodded to her, then stalked from the room.

Rusts. Was that how Aradel saw Waxillium? A rogue nobleman accustomed to getting what he wanted, blunt in ways that Aradel could never be? The constable-general wasn’t a nobleman, and had to worry about funding, politics, the future of his men. Waxillium could just butt in and do what he liked, shooting and letting his status—both as an Allomancer and a house lord—get him out of it.

That perspective was eye-opening. Waxillium was a *trouble*. A worthwhile trouble, as he did get things done, but almost as bad as the problems he solved. But for that brief moment he seemed less an ally and more a storm that you had to prepare for and clean up after.

Disturbed, she walked up through the room to join him beside the body.

"Those spikes give off strong lines," Waxillium noted to her, pointing at Father Bin's ruined face. "To my Allomantic senses, I mean. From what I've read, I think that means they're not Hemalurgic spikes. Those are supposed to be tough to see and Push on, like metalminds."

"What would spiking him accomplish?" Marasi asked.

"No idea," Waxillium said. "Still, when you get that body down, send me a sample of metal from each spike. I want to run some tests on their composition."

"All right," Marasi said.

"We should have seen it. She's trying to drive a wedge between the Pathians and the Survivorists."

"The governor is Pathian," Marasi said. "We think Bleeder is trying to get at him."

"You're right," Waxillium said, narrowing his eyes. "But that's not her true goal. She wants to overthrow the city. Perhaps the governor's murder will be the capstone. But what does this have to do with me?"

"Everything doesn't *have* to be about you, you know."

"Not everything," Waxillium agreed. "Just this."

Annoyingly, he was probably right. Why else would Bleeder be parading around the city wearing the body of the man who had killed Waxillium's wife? Waxillium left the corpse, pushing out of the building though the rear exit. There a narrow alleyway led out to the street. Marasi followed, joining Waxillium in the darkness and mists.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"You don't plan a dramatic murder like this one without preparing an escape route," Waxillium said. "From the discarded handkerchiefs and handbags left behind, I'd guess the room was full when she revealed the body. The worshippers ran out the main doors, and the murderer would have expected this. She would have come out the back, getting away while everyone was either fleeing or stunned."

"Okay…"

"Narrow alley," Waxillium said, kneeling to inspect the wall. "Look at this."

Marasi squinted. The bricks along the wall here had been scraped, leaving behind something that had rubbed off on them. "Looks metallic. Silvery."

"Paint, I'd guess," Waxillium said. "Where it came from is a small question, unfortunately, compared to the larger ones. Why would she kill this priest in the first place? She warned me she was going to. I thought she meant your father. Not Father Bin."

"Waxillium," Marasi said. "We need more information. About what this creature can do, and what its motives might be."

"Agreed," Waxillium said. He rose and stared down the alleyway. "I'd like to ask God a few hard questions. I doubt He's going to make Himself available, however, so we'll have to settle for someone else."

"Who?" Marasi asked.

"I had some help tonight," Waxillium said. "From an unexpected source. I have a feeling that an interview with her will be illuminating. Want to come?"

"Of course I do," Marasi said. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Well," Waxillium said, "I'm worried that interacting with her might prove … theologically difficult."

13

Wayne didn’t consider himself to be a particularly religious man. He figured that Harmony didn’t pay much attention to fellows like him, for the same reason a master painter didn’t often wonder what his mom had done with the pictures he’d given her as a toddler.

That said, Wayne *did* like to visit the temple of the common man now and then. It made him feel better and forget his problems for a spell. So he knew the place when Wax sent him on ahead to check it over.

The temple huddled on the corner of an intersection, a stately old building, squat and stubborn. Newer tenements perched on either side, some six stories tall, but the temple had the air of an old gaffer in his chair who hadn’t the inclination to look higher than a fellow’s knees. As Wayne had expected, the door was open and friendly, still spilling out light, though it was starting to get late. He strolled down the lane and nodded to the temple guard, who wore a cap and overalls for his uniform and bore a ceremonial stick what seemed to have bits of hair sticking out of the end, likely from clubbing men upside the head for being too rowdy.

Wayne tipped his hat to the man and chanted the proper invocation to gain admittance. “Hello, Blue. How watery’s the beer today?”

“Don’t make trouble at the pub tonight, Wayne,” the man intoned in response. “My temper is really short.”

“Temper?” Wayne said, passing him. “That’s a funny name for it, mate, but if the ladies like you givin’ silly names to your body parts, I ain’t gonna say nothin’.”

Ritual introductions finished, Wayne stepped into the temple proper. Inside, men and women bowed at their places, heads drooping as they considered the deep complexities of the cosmere. Their prayers were made in mumbled exchanges to friends, and their incense in the burning of pipes. A picture of Old Ladrian himself hung over the altar, a man with a ripe paunch and a cup thrust forward, as if to demand attention.

Wayne stood in the doorway, head bowed in respect, and dabbed his fingers into a trail of beer dripping from a nearby table, then anointed himself on the forehead and navel, the mark of the spear.

The scent marked him as a pilgrim upon this holy ground, and he passed among the penitent seeking forgiveness on his way to the altar. The air of the place was odd tonight. Solemn. Yes, the temple was a place of contemplation, but it should also be a place of joy. Where were the hymns, sung in a holy slur? Where was the laughter, the joyful noise of celebration?

Not good, he thought as he settled onto one of the pews—in this case a rough, circular table with scriptures carved into it, like *Mic is a total git* and *The sausages is rubbish*. He’d always liked that one. It brought up real theological implications, it did. If the food they ate was trash, were they ultimately trash? Were they all nothing in the end? Or should one instead see even trash as something to be elevated, as it had been created by the God Beyond like everything else?

Wayne settled back in his seat and drew a few looks from nearby tables. As a lovely young conventicalist in a plunging top passed by carrying mugs, he took her arm. “I’ll haaave…” he blinked. “Ahll have some whiskey.” He had the accent and tone of a man who had been very, *very* pious already this night.

The maid shook her head and continued on her way. Those nearby ignored him. Wayne closed his eyes and listened to their prayers.

“They’re just gonna let us starve. You heard the governor, Ren. All he cares about is his rusting reputation.”

“We’re supposed to have the good life. Harmony made this land for us all. But do we get to enjoy it? No. Its riches only mean that the fine folk get more outfits and big houses.”

“Something needs to change in this city. I ain’t out of work like those fellows at the steel mill, but Harmony…”

“Sixteen-hour shifts. I leave before my little girl gets up, and she’s in bed before I get back. See her once a week, I do.”

“We work and die so we can give it all up to the same people. They own the building we live in. Ain’t that the scam? Work for them all day, then give it all back at night for the privilege of bein’ able to survive another day to keep workin’.”

Weighty prayers, those were.

Wayne kicked back away from his table and walked to the altar at the front of the room, with its bottles on the rack behind shining in the light. Gas lights. Real traditional, this temple was. He settled down at the altar between a fellow with suspenders and another with arms so hairy he had to have some bear in him. Grandfather, at least.

“Whhiskey,” Wayne said to the priest behind the altar.

The man gave him a cup of water with a lemon in it instead. Rusts. Might have laid the accent on a little too thick. Wayne settled back, sipping his water.

The men here at the altar, they didn’t complain. They just stared, holding their cups. Wayne nodded. Those were silent prayers, the kind that you could read in their eyes. He reached out and plucked the cup from the next man’s hands and gave it a sniff. Plain rum. What fun was that?

He reached over to bear-fur and plucked his drink from his fingers as well, and gave it a sniff. Both men turned toward him as he downed the rest of his water, then mixed their drinks together in his cup. He gave it a squeeze of his lemon and a pinch of sugar from behind the altar, then added some ice, placed a coaster on top, and shook like his life depended on it. Which it might, since the fellow with rugs on his arms had just stood up and cracked his knuckles.

Before he could start pounding, Wayne spun a cup toward each man and settled back in thought. The cups settled into place, and the altar fell silent. Hesitant, the men reached out and tried their drinks. Suspenders tried his first.

“*Wow*,” the man said. “What did you do?”

Wayne didn’t reply, tapping the table with one finger as hairy-arms tried his drink and nodded appreciatively. Living among the fancy folk had taught Wayne a few things. Fancy folk couldn’t ever do anything the ordinary way. Sometimes he thought they acted strange just so they wouldn’t be like regular folk.

But they *did* know how to get drunk. He’d give them that.

The priest came over to investigate the disturbance, but both men just wanted more of what Wayne had made. The priest listened to them try to explain it, and then nodded—looked like he’d worked some fancy parties, or had some rich folk come in.

Wayne slipped something onto the altar. A couple of bullet casings.

“What’s this?” the priest asked, setting down the cup he’d been wiping. “Is this … is this *aluminum*?”

Wayne stood up and gathered a few things from behind the altar, then piled them in the priest’s arms. He had ice, fortunately, from a delivery earlier. That was getting cheaper and cheaper these days, with shipments down from the mountains. The fellow also had a nice collection of spirits and some fixings. Enough for Wayne to make do.

Wayne pointed for the man to follow him, then began working his way through the room. He stopped at each table, taking their drinks and reworking them. Those with beer got juice or soda water, mixed carefully and transformed. He always left them with something like what they’d started with, but new. Fresh. He added ginger to some—worked real nice with lemon—and bitters to others. He tried to use something from every table, and only got cussed at a couple of times. Before too long, he had the temple feeling far more companionable. In fact, he’d drawn something of a crowd.

The group cheered as he settled down at a table in front of a tall, pretty woman with large eyes and long fingers. The drink he made for her wasn’t actually anything special—gin and lime, with some soda water and a hint of sugar—but the secret ingredient … well, that *was* something special. A pouch of blue powder he’d found at the party earlier that night. He’d traded some sand for it.

He mixed the powder into the drink with a hidden twist of the fingers, shaking, before finally adding the lime. As he slid the cup in front of the woman, the drink’s blue liquid swirled and moved, then blushed to a deep violet, the color moving through it like growing mists.

Those around him hushed in awe, and the woman smiled at him. He gave her a grin back. He was taken, yes, but he needed to keep practicing his flirtin’ or Ranette was likely to start ignoring him.

And then the skin of the woman’s cheeks shifted to *blue,* then *violet,* just like the drink had. Wayne jumped back from the table as her skin returned to normal. She took the drink with a sly smile and sipped at it. “Nice,” she said, “but I usually like something with more kick to it.”

The others in the temple were retreating to their pews. They’d enjoyed the show, but were looking forward to enjoying their liquor even more. They didn’t seem to have noticed what the woman’s skin had done. Perhaps Wayne had been mistaken. He hesitantly took the seat back and looked at the woman, whose eyes—clear as daylight—shifted from blue to violet, then once again to blue.

“Well hang me,” Wayne said. “You’re that immortal, ain’t you?”

“Sure am,” she said, sipping her drink and holding out her hand for him to shake. “Name’s MeLaan. Waxillium told me to say ‘all yellow pants’ to prove it. You did well here tonight. When I first arrived, I felt like the place was going to burst from all the anger. You might have stopped a riot.”

“It’s just one pub,” Wayne said, shaking her hand, then settling back in his chair. “One outta hundreds. If a riot is brewin’, I can’t stop it with some girly drinks.”

“True, I suppose.”

“What I need to do,” Wayne said, “is get the whole *city* drunk.”

“Or, you know, advocate workers’ rights to bring down working hours, improve conditions, and meet a base minimum of pay.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Wayne said. “That too. But if I could get *everybody* drunk, think how much happier this city would be.”

“So long as you get *me* drunk first, I’d be fine with it.” She held out her cup to him. “Top a lady off, will you?”

Wayne frowned. “Now, this ain’t right. You’re some kinda demigod or something. Shouldn’t you be moralizin’ at me?”

“Lo, behold,” MeLaan said, wiggling her cup, “bring an offering to your deity in the form of one blue sunset, extra gin. And ye shall be blessed.”

“I think I can do that,” Wayne said. “Bloody hell, maybe I *am* religious after all.”

* * *

The immortal demigod took a throaty slurp of her beer, then slammed the mug down onto the table, grinning like a four-year-old who had been paid in cookies to rat out her sister. Wax studied her as she looked Wayne in the eyes and let out a belch that could have woken the dead. Beside Wax, Wayne nodded in appreciation, looking quite impressed. He then downed his own beer and belched back at MeLaan, easily twice as long and loud.

“How do you *do* that?” MeLaan asked.

“Years of trainin’ and practice,” Wayne said.

“I’ve been alive for well over half a millennium,” MeLaan said. “I am *certain* I have more practice than you.”

“You don’t have the *will*, though,” Wayne said, wagging his finger. “You gotta *want* it.” He downed the rest of his mug and let out a protracted belch.

Marasi, who sat next to Wax in their booth at the pub, looked horrified by the exchange. Wax had allowed her to drive them here, if only so he could rebind his wound and check it over. The painkillers were doing their job, though. He could barely feel the hit.

After the short ride, he and Marasi had walked in on these two in the middle of their belching … contest? Wax wasn’t certain if it was a contest, or more a matter of mutual appreciation, like two virtuosos playing their favorite songs.

MeLaan finished her beer, then dramatically held up her hand. The palm split, forming lips, which then let out a soft belch.

“Cheating,” Wayne said.

“Just using what Father gave me,” MeLaan said. “Don’t tell me you wouldn’t belch out of other body parts if you could.”

“Well,” Wayne said, “now that you mention it, I *can* make a real interestin’ sound wif—”

Wax cleared his throat. “Not to defer a conversation about which parts of Wayne’s body can and can’t make noise, but I have to admit that you aren’t what I expected, Your Grace.”

“Bloody hell,” MeLaan said. “Please don’t call me that.”

“You’re a servant of Harmony,” Wax said.

“I’m from one of the later generations,” MeLaan said. “In kandra terms, I’m basically still a kid.”

“You lived through the Catacendre,” Wax said. “You knew the Originators.”

“I spent the Catacendre underground,” MeLaan said. “I was an adolescent, and didn’t know the land when it was covered in ash. You really don’t need to be intimidated by me.”

“You’re over *six hundred* years old,” Marasi said.

“So is dirt,” MeLaan said. She leaned forward. “Look, I’m just here to help. If you want someone to fawn over, I’ll send VenDell or one of the really ancient ones to you. They like it. I just want to see Paalm stopped, then helped.”

Wax leaned forward on the table. He could sense in the way MeLaan smiled at people passing by—the way she tapped her finger to the tavern song a group of drunk men sang in the corner—that she liked people. She liked being here, among them. She wasn’t aloof, as he’d expected, or withdrawn. Not even that alien, despite the fact that she’d just made a mouth in her hand. “You’re the one who brought me my earring,” he said, fingering his ear with its tiny spike. “All those years ago.”

MeLaan’s smile widened. “I was wearing the same body, but I’m still surprised you remember.”

“And whose body is it?” Marasi asked. “Where did you get those bones?”

“I made them,” MeLaan said, raising her chin. Her face went transparent, suddenly, revealing the skull underneath—one made of carved crystal of a vivid emerald color. “I prefer True Bodies, though if I need to I can take another form. I’ll warn you, as far as kandra go, I’m only so-so at impersonation.”

“And this one we’re huntin’?” Wayne asked. He’d started building a houselike tower using the thin wooden coasters strewn around the tavern table, balancing them on their ends.

“Paalm?” MeLaan said, turning her face back to normal. “She was one of our best. Of all the kandra I know, only TenSoon is better at it than she is.”

“But she’ll be erratic,” Wax said. “She’s gone mad. That should help us spot her, even in disguise, right?”

“Maybe,” MeLaan said, grimacing. She took a few of the coasters and started her own tower. “Paalm is good, and imitation … well, it’s kind of *ingrained* in us, particularly the older kandra who worked back in the days of the Final Empire. Some of them don’t feel like they have personalities of their own; they don’t know how to live unless they’re being someone else.”

“You seem to find the idea disturbing,” Wax said, curious.

“I’m a youngster,” she said with a shrug. “Never really had to serve the Lord Ruler. I’ve always served Harmony, who seems like a generally nice fellow.”

An odd way to refer to God. Wax glanced at Marasi, who cocked an eyebrow at him and shrugged. Around them, the pubgoers chattered with a low hum of energy and enthusiasm. Wax and the others had settled into a secluded booth at the side. The warm gas lighting was somehow friendlier, more alive than the electric lights back at his mansion.

“All right,” Wax said to MeLaan. “Let’s talk about what Bleeder can do. And about how to kill her.”

“You don’t need to kill her,” MeLaan said quickly, getting her tower to a second story. She glanced at Wayne, who already had his up to three levels. “Just remove her remaining spike, which will basically immobilize her. She’s confused; we can deal with her once we have her in custody.”

“Confused?” Wax said. “She killed a priest by *nailing him through the eyes*.”

MeLaan’s smile faded. “She only has one spike. She’s not thinking straight.”

“Yes,” Wax said, “but she pulled the other spike out herself, right?”

“We think so,” MeLaan admitted. “We’re weaker than other Hemalurgic creatures. Only two spikes, and we can be taken. So she removed one.”

“She wanted freedom to kill,” Wax said. “She’s not ‘confused,’ MeLaan. She’s destructive and possibly psychotic. Tell me how to kill her.”

MeLaan sighed. “Acid works, but that’s horribly inefficient. If you crush her skeleton, she’ll have a hard time moving, so maybe use that. Gunshots will be useless, as will most forms of physical damage. The spike—it’s the key. Pull it out, and she’ll revert to her primal state. It *is* the best way.”

“Her primal state,” Marasi said. “A mistwraith.”

MeLaan nodded.

Wax tapped the table in thought. “If I can get the spike out, chances are that I’ve already immobilized her. If she’s tied up, what good will it do to remove the spike?”

“Waxillium,” MeLaan said, leaning forward, “you *do* realize what you’re dealing with? Paalm was trained by the ancients, and served the Lord Ruler *himself*. She quashed rebellions and overthrew kingdoms in his service, and she is intimately familiar with the intricacies of Hemalurgy. By your own accounts, she’s learned to use spikes to grant herself Allomancy and

Feruchemy—something we thought impossible. If you have her captured, that is a state she's not likely to remain in for long. *Remove that spike.*"

Wax felt a chill. "Right," he said. "Will do."

"Rusts," Marasi whispered. "I thought you didn't want us to be intimidated by you."

"Me?" the kandra said. "I'm harmless." She waved at the barmaid, then pointed at her mug. "I'm far less crazy than Paalm."

"Great," Wax said. He glanced at Wayne. "You look concerned."

"Me?" Wayne said, placing a fourth level onto his tower. "Sorry. Tryin' to think of how to get everyone in the city drunk."

"I … I'm not going to ask." Wax grabbed a few of the coasters as a barmaid dropped more on the table, noticing that they were playing with them. He started building a tower of his own. "So we get the spike out. How?"

"Easiest way is to call me," MeLaan said. "I can get it out. But if I'm not there, don't wait on me. Break her bones, start pulling them out, and eventually you'll find the spike. It will take a strong stomach."

Great. "Is there a way to spot a kandra? Wound patterns? Blood samples?"

MeLaan dug into her pocket. "Once we've shifted shapes, we lock into that body and *are* that person. We'll bleed, and if you take off a finger, our prints will remain that of the person we're imitating. Even another kandra will have trouble spotting a duplicate. Haven't you read the Historica?"

"Several times," Wax said, "but the kandra sections are kind of dull."

"I feel like I should be offended by that."

"Then you aren't drunk enough," Wayne responded. Five levels. Wax shook his head and concentrated on getting his second level built.

"Anyway," MeLaan said, "locating other kandra was a problem in the past. So we did something about it, just in case. The more scientifically minded among us developed this."

She slid something onto the table. A pair of needles, about as long as a man's palm is wide, attached to metal syringes. Wax held one up.

"Inject that into a kandra," MeLaan said, "and the liquid inside will make her shape droop for a bit. The skin briefly goes clear, reveals who she really is."

"Nifty," Wayne said.

“One problem though,” MeLaan said. “If you stick it into someone who *isn’t* a kandra, it will kill them.”

“Inconvenient,” Marasi said, examining the other one.

“Yeah,” MeLaan said. “We’re working on that part. This is a last resort, obviously, but it *will* immobilize her briefly. If you want to find Paalm before using it, you can try to catch her in a lie. She won’t have the actual memories of the person she’s imitating. Conversely, if you see someone who isn’t Metalborn use a power, that outs her too.”

“I’ve got a feeling that if she’s using her powers right in front of me, I’m dead anyway,” Wax said.

The group fell silent. Wax took both syringes and tucked them into the pouch on his gunbelt. Marasi scribbled on a note pad, transcribing the conversation—he’d have to ask her for a copy. Drink refills arrived, and no payment was requested. What had Wayne done here before Wax arrived? He was afraid to ask.

What help is this? Wax thought, frustrated, his tower falling to pieces. A weapon he could use only when he was already a hundred percent certain who the impostor was? It felt like so little. Bleeder could be anyone. Bleeder could manifest any of the powers. Bleeder was ancient, brilliant, and crafty. …

“She has a plan,” Wax said. “She’s *not* simply crazy, MeLaan. There is more to this.”

“You’re still determined to kill her,” MeLaan said, sighing.

“If I have to. Why are you so hesitant? I’d think that the kandra would be determined, more than anyone, to see this problem dealt with.”

“She’s not a ‘problem,’” MeLaan said. “She’s a person. Yes, I want to see her stopped. She *needs* to be stopped. But…” She settled back, then knocked over her small tower of coasters with a flick of the finger. “There’s so few of us left. Hell, there weren’t ever more than five or six hundred of us, and we lost a lot in the days before the Final Ascension. Imagine if your entire race consisted of three hundred people, lawman. Maybe you’d be a little more hesitant to see one of them slagged.”

“A person’s species shouldn’t matter,” Wax snapped. “I don’t care if there are three hundred of you left or just three; when one of you starts nailing people to walls in my city, I’m going to—”

“Wax,” Wayne interrupted, balancing his *sixth* story of beer-mat coasters. “Check your pulse, mate.”

Wax took a deep breath. “Sorry,” he said.

“What was that,” Marasi said, wagging her pencil from Wayne to Wax. “Pulse?”

“Sometimes,” Wayne said, “Wax forgets he’s a person and starts thinkin’ he’s a rock instead.”

“It’s Wayne speak,” Wax said, grabbing some coasters and starting another tower. “For times when he thinks I should be a little more empathetic.”

“You can be single-minded, mate.”

“Says the man who once collected eighty different kinds of beer bottles.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said, smiling fondly. “Did that mostly to annoy you, I did.”

“You’re kidding.”

He shook his head. “Started to hate all those rusting bottles, but each morning you’d curse when you tripped over a new box o’ them, and it was just so melodious…”

“You know,” MeLaan said, taking a pull on her drink, “you two aren’t *anything* like I was led to believe.”

“Tell me about it,” Marasi said.

“For one thing,” MeLaan added, “I had no idea that Kid Wayne was so talented with beer-mat sculptures.”

“He cheated,” Wax said. “He stuck some of the coasters on his lower level together with that gum stuff he’s been chewing.”

Marasi and MeLaan turned to Wayne, who grinned. He picked up his sculpture, knocking down the top levels, but revealing that the bottom three had—indeed—been stuck together.

“Wayne,” Marasi said, aghast. “Are you that concerned with impressing us?”

“It wasn’t about impressing anyone,” Wax said. “The contest wasn’t about how high the towers got—it was about if I’d spot what he did. He always cheats somehow. Back to the matter at hand, MeLaan. Your rogue kandra friend is planning something. If her plot gains momentum, it will roll over us and crush this city.”

“I agree,” MeLaan said. “So what do we do?”

“We outthink her,” Wax said. “I need to know her motive. *Why* is she doing this? What drove her to pull out her spike in the first place?”

“I wish I knew,” MeLaan said. “We’ve been trying to figure out the same thing.”

“Tell me about her, then,” Wax said, tapping at his empty shot glass. “What is she like? What are her passions?”

“Paalm was the ultimate blank slate,” MeLaan said. “Old-style kandra. Like I said, she spent so much time out on missions that she barely had a personality of her own. She had real trouble with that at the dawn of a new world. Some of the older generations, they liked to spend time in the Homeland, only left for a mission when forced to. Not Paalm. She was the Father’s own, the kandra reserved specifically to do missions for the Lord Ruler.” She hesitated. “She might know things from him. Things the rest of us weren’t told. I think he may even have had her imitate Inquisitors at times, act as a mole among them.

“Anyway, she wouldn’t have been able to impersonate an Inquisitor without a good grasp of Allomancy and Feruchemy. So maybe that’s where she got the knowledge. She was loyal to the Lord Ruler, and then when he was gone, she became loyal to Harmony. Fanatical about it. Insisted on being given mission after mission, and never spent time with the rest of us. Kept to herself. She was almost always in character. Until…”

“Murderous rampage,” Wayne said softly. “It’s always the quiet ones. Well, and the psychopathic ones. That too.”

So what does that tell me? Wax thought, leaving his little tower at three stories. *How would I approach this if it were any other criminal?*

MeLaan leaned back for a moment, as if lost in thought, then flipped a coaster at Wax’s tower to knock it down. She grunted.

“What?” Wax said.

“I was just curious to see if you were cheating too.”

“Wax never cheats,” Wayne said, face halfway in his mug. Wax had never figured out how he could talk and drink at the same time without choking.

“That’s incorrect,” Wax said. “I cheat *infrequently*. That way nobody’s expecting it.” He stood up. “Can you think of a reason Bleeder would target the governor in particular?”

MeLaan shook her head.

“Do any of the other kandra know her better than you do?”

“Maybe one of the older ones,” MeLaan said. “I’ll see if I can get one of them to come talk to you.”

“Good,” Wax said. “But first I want you three watching the governor.”

"I've got to report in to the precinct offices first," Marasi said. "I want to follow up on something there."

"Fine," Wax said. "Wayne, you head to the governor's mansion first."

"He ditched me last time."

"He won't again," Wax said. "I've persuaded him to listen, though we'll need him to meet MeLaan soon."

"Sure, all right," Wayne said. "It wasn't like I was planning to, you know, *sleep* tonight or anythin'."

"Sleep might be in short supply going forward," Wax said.

"You want me to go with him, Dawnshot?" MeLaan asked.

"Depends. Marasi, would you like some backup?"

"Yes please," she said.

"Watch her," Wax said, nodding toward Marasi. "And maybe give Aradel a glimpse of your nature. It's probably time to inform him what we're up against."

"Already done," Marasi said. "Though I'm sure he'd like proof."

Wax grunted. He hadn't ordered her to do that. "Be quick about your errand," Wax told her. "And get to the governor. I want more than one set of eyes on him. And before we split, I want each pair of us to exchange codes, individual and unknown to the others, so we each have a way to authenticate ourselves to one another. I've done the same with the governor and his top staff." Harmony, this was going to be a nightmare.

"Watching the governor isn't going to be enough, Wax," Marasi said, standing up from the table. "You yourself said it. Too reactive. So what else are we going to do?"

"I'll come up with something."

The others stood, and Wax towed Wayne by the arm to check to see that they were square with the pub manager. Surprisingly, Wayne had indeed paid for everything he should have. On their way toward the door, Wax explained to his friend a little idea he had for protecting the governor.

They stepped into the entryway of the pub, where MeLaan was waiting while Marasi fired up her beast of a motorcar. Wayne hiked off to catch a carriage to take him to the governor's mansion, and Wax took MeLaan by the arm.

"I hate this," he noted, soft enough to keep the bouncer outside from hearing. "Not being able to trust people I should always be able to. Second-guessing myself."

"Yeah," she replied. "But you'll handle it. There's a reason He came to you for this." She stepped in closer. Rusts, she was attractive—but then, it would be odd if she weren't, all things considered. "You and I aren't the only ones hunting Paalm, lawman—every kandra in the city is searching for her. Thing is, I don't think many of my brothers and sisters will be of use. They're timid about hurting others, particularly after what TenSoon was forced to do during the Remarked Duplicity. And beyond that, they can be an … inconsistent group."

"They're God's servants," Wax said.

"Yes," MeLaan replied, "and they've had centuries upon centuries to refine their eccentricities. Getting older does *not* tend to make you more normal, let me tell you. We don't think like killers. We've been too closely in contact with Harmony. What Paalm is doing, it baffles us. It goes against everything we've believed and lived for centuries. I don't think we'll be able to find her, not in time. But you … you can."

"Because I think like a killer."

"I didn't—"

"It's all right," Wax said, releasing her arm. "I am what I am." He took his mistcoat from the peg by the door and shrugged it on before stepping out into the night. "Thanks, by the way," he said.

"For?"

He tapped his ear, and the earring he wore in it. "This."

"I was just the delivery girl."

"Doesn't matter. It was what I needed. When I needed it." He dropped a bullet casing, then stilled it with his foot. "I'll meet you all at the governor's mansion."

14

If you want to know a man, dig in his firepit.

The phrase was from the Roughs, maybe koloss in origin. Basically, it meant that you could judge a lot about a man’s life by what he threw away—or by what he was willing to burn in order to stay warm.

A loud church clock rang eleven as Wax moved through the mists on Allomantic jumps. The sound echoed in the night, the bell tower hidden in the darkness. Eleven was not late these days, particularly not in the heart of the city, but it *should* have marked a time when most men and women had begun to seek their beds. Labor started early in the morning.

Only, a sizable portion of the laborers in the city didn’t have a job to get up for right now. That was reflected in the busy streets and busier pubs, not to mention the Soothing parlors he passed, still open well into the night. Those were places where the downhearted could seek a different kind of relief, in the form of an Allomancer who—for a small fee—would wipe away their emotions for a time and leave them numb.

Rioting parlors were a different beast. There, you could choose the emotion you wanted and have it stoked within you. Those might be even more popular, judging by the line he saw outside one.

Wax delayed on a rooftop, listening, then headed for the sound of men shouting. He ran along the peaked roof and Pushed off the nails in the shingles, launching himself over a set of apartments in a quiet flutter, coming down and landing on a street beyond.

Here, he found a small Pathian sanctuary. Not the church with the bell he'd heard earlier; Pathian structures were too small for that. Built to resemble old Terris huts, they were often empty save for two chairs. One for you. One, ostensibly, for Harmony. The religion forbade worship, in a formal way. But talking to God was encouraged.

Tonight, the little sanctuary was under siege.

They shouted and threw rocks: a group of shadows in the mist, probably drunk. He could make them out well enough; a misty night was never too dark in the city, not with all the ambient light reflecting off the vapors.

Wax yanked Vindication from her holster and stalked forward, mistcoat flaring behind him. His profile was enough. The first man who spotted him emerging from the mists yelled a warning and the men scattered, leaving the detritus of their tiny riot. Fallen stones. A few bottles. Wax watched their metal lines to make sure none of them rounded back on him. One stopped nearby, but kept his distance.

He shook his head, stepping up to the sanctuary. He found the missionary cowering inside, a Terriswoman in intricate braids. Pathian clergy was a strange thing. On one hand, the religion emphasized man's personal connection to Harmony—doing good, without formality. On the other hand, people needed direction. Someone to explain all of this. Pathian missionaries—called priests by outsiders, though they rarely used the term for themselves—set up in places like this, explaining the Path to all who came. A clergy, yes, but not in the formal way of the Survivorists.

He'd always found it curious that the small Pathian sanctuaries—with large doorways on eight sides—let in the mists, while Survivorist churches observed the mists from behind domes of glass, comfortable in their ornate rooms full of golden statues and fine wood pews. The woman looked up at him as he knelt, smelling oil. Her lantern lay broken nearby.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I … Yes," she said. "Thank you."

Her eyes flicked toward the gun. On principle, Wax didn't holster the thing. "It would be best if you retired for the night," Wax said.

“But I live in the loft upstairs.”

“Go to the Village then,” Wax said. “In fact, gather any of your colleagues you can in a short time and take them as well. A Survivorist priest has been brutally murdered by someone posing as a Pathian missionary.”

“Sweet Harmonies,” the woman whispered.

Wax left her to gather her things and, hopefully, do as he told her. He struck out into the night, following a few lines of metal toward where the man he’d scared off earlier had hidden. Wax studied the darkened alleyway in the mists, then dropped a shell casing and launched himself into the air. A careful Push let him drop straight into the alleyway, where he landed and leveled a gun at the head of the person hiding there.

Who immediately soiled himself, judging from the stench and the liquid pooling at the young man’s feet. Wax sighed and lifted Vindication. The young man scrambled backward, stumbling over a box of trash, adding to his humiliation.

“You’re going to leave that missionary alone,” Wax said. “She had nothing to do with the murder.”

The youth nodded. Wax dropped a shell casing and prepared to launch himself back into the night.

“M-murder?” the youth asked.

“Of the…” Wax hesitated. “Wait. Why were you here, attacking that sanctuary?”

The boy whimpered. “They came into the pub, two of them in those Pathian robes, and cursed out the Survivor an’ us.”

“*Two?*” Wax said, advancing on the boy, making him cringe. “There was more than one?”

He nodded, then—crying—scrambled away and ran into the night. Wax let him go.

I should have guessed, he thought, launching himself into the air. *The news of the murder couldn’t have traveled this quickly.* There was more to the plot than the one killing. Rusts. Were other priests in danger?

Two people. Bleeder and someone else? Or two helpers? MeLaan had seemed confident that Bleeder would be working alone, but this offered evidence to the contrary. And the attempt to kill Wax earlier, the ploy involving the server at ZoBell Tower, matched too well with his fears of an assassin to be coincidence. Bleeder had help, likely from Wax’s uncle. He’d look into that later. For now, however, there was a different lead he wanted to chase.

He eventually reached the location he'd set out to find: Ashweather Carriage and Coach, a large open yard at the northern edge of the octant where a fleet of carriages of various styles was stored. Rich-looking landaus with retractable tops. Conventional buggies, with less lavish upholstery and wood, to attract a modest clientele. A few surrey-style, with frilled tops.

By far the most common in the carriage park was the standard road coach: the four-wheeled vehicle with a completely enclosed passenger compartment, and room at the top front for a driver. They called them Barringtons in the city, after Lord Barrington, and though the paint jobs could vary wildly, the style was pretty much standardized. Wax's own coaches were Barringtons.

He counted seven in a line here, all lit by electric lamps atop towering stanchions high enough to light the whole yard and adjacent large, low buildings. Those were stables, of course, as his nose confirmed. All of the Ashweather Company's carriages were painted a shiny black, common for vehicles used as cabs in the city, and they had a round shield on the side proclaiming the Cett family heritage.

A shield painted silver. The color that had scraped onto the bricks in the alleyway outside the church. Bleeder had likely fled in a coach just like one of these, one that had been told to wait while Bleeder killed the priest.

Wax inspected each vehicle in turn, running his fingers over the silver-painted shields on the sides. No scrapes.

"Can I help you?" a curt voice demanded. Steelsight indicated a person walking up the row of vehicles. No weapon held, but metal buttons on his coat, a ring on each hand, some change in the pocket, and a watch in his waistcoat. A few pins in the collar of his shirt—very small lines—gave Wax an idea of how tall the man was.

Wax turned toward the voice. The man turned out to be a pudgy fellow in a distinctive formal suit with long tails, identifying him as the establishment's proprietor. Wax had known more than a few Cetts in his time. He'd never gotten along with any of them. Lean or fat, rich or scrawny, they all got the same calculating look on their faces as they tried to estimate how much money Wax would be willing to part with.

This Cett's eyes flicked toward Wax's suit, which was rumpled, swum-in, and missing the cravat. With the duster on, he likely didn't look very distinguished—and the man's expression hardened. Then he saw the tassels on the duster.

His entire demeanor changed immediately. His posture went from "Stay away from my coaches" to "You look like the type who will pay extra for velvet pillows." "My lord," he added, nodding his head. "Would you like to hire a coach for the evening?"

"You know me?" Wax said.

"Waxillium Ladrian, I believe."

"Good," Wax said, digging into his pocket and removing a small steel sheet, engraved on one side. His credentials, proof that he was a constable. "I'm on constabulary business. How many of these coaches do you have?" Wax nodded toward the line.

Cett's expression fell as he realized Wax wasn't likely to be paying him for anything tonight. "Twenty-three," the man finally said.

"Lots of coaches still in service for the night," Wax said. "Considering the hour."

"We work as long as people are out, constable," Cett said. "And tonight, people are out."

Wax nodded. "I need a list of the drivers who are still working, their routes, and any prearranged clients they picked up today."

"Of course." Cett seemed more relaxed as he led Wax toward a small building in the center of the carriage yard. As they walked, a coach arrived—no scraped sides—drawn by a pair of sweaty horses with drooping heads and a bit of froth at the mouths. Long hours for the beasts too, it seemed.

Inside the building, Cett fetched some records from a desk. *Too eager,* Wax thought as the man hurried over and offered them. Whenever someone worked with the authorities too easily, it made Wax's eye twitch. So he took his time browsing through the lists Cett proffered and kept an eye on the man as he did so. "What percentage of your pickups are impromptu, and what percentage are arranged ahead of time?"

"Half and half, for the black coaches," Cett said. "The open carriages are more spur-of-the-moment." He had a good game face, but something *was* bothering him. What was he hiding?

You think everyone is hiding something, Wax told himself, flipping through the pages. *Stay on the task at hand.*

Wax dug into the list, hoping Bleeder had decided to hire a coach for a pickup to be certain she had her escape planned, rather than just grabbing a cab on the street. Finding the one who had driven her would be useful either way. He looked over the records for the drivers still out for the night. Each had a few prearranged pickups over the course of the day, but only three had been scheduled around the time of the murder. And two of those were repeat customers with a long list of pickups in the past.

That left one. A person to be picked up in the Fourth Octant, and to be driven "at liberty," meaning they were to be driven as long as the client wished. Shanwan was the name listed. A Terris name. The word meant "secret."

"I need to find this driver," Wax said, holding up the list and pointing. *If they're still alive.*

"Coach sixteen," Cett said, rubbing his chin. "That's Chapaou's. No telling when he'll be back; you probably don't want to wait. I can send you a message when he returns."

"Maybe," Wax said, but dallied.

The door slammed open and a young woman in trousers and suspenders burst in. "Boss," she said, "late-night play getting out on Bonnweather. They're going to want rides."

"We sent coaches there already."

"Not enough," the young woman said. "Boss, there are *lots* of men on the streets. Common men, the type that will make the rich folk nervous. Playgoers will want carriages."

Cett nodded. "Wake Jone and Forgeron. Send them and anyone else you can rouse. Anything more?"

"We could have more wheels out for certain, particularly near the pubs."

"Coinshot," Wax guessed, noticing the bag of metal bits—probably pieces of scrap—the young woman carried. "You've been using Allomancer runners to scout for busy areas to send drivers."

"Is that surprising?" Cett asked.

"It's expensive."

"You have to spend money to make money, constable," Cett said. "And as you can see, I'm having a very busy night. Perhaps you could leave me to it, if I promise to—"

"Coinshot," Wax said to the girl. "You see coach number sixteen out there? I assume your boss has you checking in on the drivers, make sure they're doing their jobs?"

"How—" she began.

“You don’t hire an Allomancer just for traffic reports,” Wax said. “Coach sixteen?”

She glanced at Cett, who nodded. So whatever Cett was hiding, it probably didn’t have to do with this driver. In fact, it probably didn’t have anything to do with Bleeder. Just your average, run-of-the-mill lawbreaking.

At least one Allomancer on staff, Wax thought.

“I didn’t see sixteen on the streets,” the young Allomancer said, turning to Wax. “But that’s because Chapaou is at a Soothing parlor over on Decan Street. His coach is around the corner.”

“At a *Soothing parlor*?” Cett demanded. “He’s on the clock!”

“I know,” the Allomancer said. “I thought you’d want to hear.”

“Hm, yes,” Wax said. “And what of the Rioter you have on staff. Are they there too?”

“Nah,” the Allomancer said. “He’s on—” She cut off, and grew pale. The entire room fell still.

“Using emotional Allomancy,” Wax said, “to drum up customers. Riot passing people, make them feel tired or urgent, and more willing to take the coach conveniently parked right across the street.”

Cett looked sick. Yes, that was it. Flagrant use of a Rioter to drum up business, a violation of the Allomantic Agreement of ’94. There were entire departments in the government that watched for this sort of thing. Fortunately, while it was a dangerous crime, it wasn’t one that worried Wax at the moment.

“You don’t have any proof…” Cett said, then thought better of it. “I’ll be speaking with my attorney. I’ll have you know that my people are off-limits for interrogation without a judicial order to—”

“Take it up with the constable-general,” Wax said. “I’m sure you’ll be hearing from him soon. For now, I need a description of this carriage driver of yours, along with the names of any pets he owns.”

* * *

Marasi walked along a counter topped with a row of rifles, each accompanied by a domed steel helmet, a folded heavy jacket, and a box of ammunition. Rusts! She hadn’t realized the constabulary had access to these kinds of weapons.

“Well,” she said, looking back at MeLaan, “we’re ready if a koloss warlord decides to invade again.”

A pair of corporals, both men, were looking over each weapon to confirm it was in good repair. Though she spotted more than one pair of bleary eyes, the place was alive with activity. More and more constables were arriving, called in for extra duty. As they entered through the main doors they tended to stop as Marasi had, looking at the row of weapons. Perhaps that was why Aradel had ordered them set out like this. A quick visual reminder of how dangerous things were growing in the city.

Marasi rounded the front counter and entered the offices behind. A young woman corporal passed by, handing Marasi a warm cup of dark tea. It smelled strong, cooked down to increase the concentration of caffeine. She tried a sip.

Yup. Awful. She drank another sip anyway. She wasn't going to embarrass herself by asking for honey when everyone else was chugging the stuff like it was some kind of contest. MeLaan trailed after her, looking around the room with interest. The voluptuous kandra drew glances. And, well, stares. It wasn't often that a gorgeous, six-and-a-half-foot-tall woman strode into the constabulary offices clad in trousers and a tight shirt. She seemed to like the attention, judging by the way she smiled at the men they passed.

Of course she likes the attention, Marasi thought. *Otherwise she wouldn't have chosen a body so exquisitely proportioned.* It seemed blatant to Marasi. After all, technically MeLaan wasn't even *human*.

"I didn't expect to find women in uniform here," MeLaan noted. "I'd assumed you to be an oddity."

"The constabulary is very egalitarian," Marasi said. "The Ascendant Warrior serves as a model for all women. You won't find as many of us here as in, say, the solicitors' offices, but it's hardly considered an unfeminine profession."

"Sure, sure," MeLaan said, smiling at a young lieutenant as the two of them made their way to the back rooms, where the records office was. "But I've always found humans to be rather sexist. A natural result of your sexual dimorphism, VenDell says."

"And kandra aren't sexist?" Marasi said, blushing.

"Hmm? Well, considering that a male kandra you're talking to today might decide to be a woman tomorrow, I'd say we have a different perspective on all that."

Marasi blushed further. "Surely you're exaggerating."

“Not really. Wow, you blush easily, don’t you? I’d have thought you’d find this natural, considering that your God is basically a hermaphrodite at this point. Both good and evil, Ruin and Preservation, light and dark, male and female. Et cetera et cetera.”

They reached the doors to the records office and Marasi turned away to hide her blush. She really wished she’d just find a way to get over her embarrassment. “Harmony’s not my god. I’m a Survivorist.”

“Oh, yeah,” MeLaan said, “because *that* makes sense. Worship the guy who died, rather than the one who saved the world.”

“The Survivor transcended death,” Marasi said, looking back, hand on the door, but not entering. “He survived even being killed, adopting the mantle of the Ascendant during the time between Preservation’s death and Vin’s Ascension.”

Rust … was she arguing theology with a demigod?

MeLaan, however, just cocked her head. “What, really?”

“Um … yes. Harmony wrote of it *himself* in the Words of Founding, MeLaan.”

“Huh. I really ought to read that thing one of these days.”

“You haven’t…” Marasi blinked, trying to fathom a world where one of the Faceless Immortals didn’t know doctrine.

“I keep meaning to,” MeLaan said, shrugging. “Never can find the time.”

“You’re over six hundred years old.”

“That’s the thing about having an eternity, kid,” MeLaan said. “It gets *really* easy to procrastinate. Are we going in that room or not?”

Marasi sighed, pushing into a room filled with filing cabinets and tables piled high with ledgers and broadsheets. This was Aradel’s doing; he liked to keep his thumb on what people were saying and writing in the city. So far, he didn’t do much with the collection besides watch for reports of crimes his men had missed, but Marasi had plans.

Unfortunately, Constable Miklin—who ran the records office—was one of Reddi’s closest friends. As Marasi entered, Miklin and the other two people working there looked up, then immediately turned back to their files.

“Who’s the civilian?” Miklin asked from his desk in the corner. How *did* he get his hair to stand up straight like that? Almost like a patch of grass growing from a pot.

“Special investigator from another jurisdiction,” Marasi said. “Lord Ladrian sent her.”

Miklin sniffed. “I’m led to believe this wisp hunt is your doing? I barely got to the offices tonight before I was sent back here to dig up information on that dam breaking.”

“What did you find?” Marasi said eagerly, slipping between two large filing cabinets—he had them arranged like sentries—and stepping up to his desk.

“Nothing,” Miklin said. “Dead end. Waste of my time.”

“I’d like to see what you found anyway,” Marasi said. “If it’s not too much trouble.”

Miklin rested his hands on the table. He spoke softly. “Why are you here, Colms?”

“I thought Aradel told you,” Marasi said. “The dam breakage might—”

“Not that. Here. In the constabulary. You had an offer to join the octant’s senior prosecutor on a permanent basis, with a letter of commendation on your internship with him. I looked into it. And now … what? You suddenly want to chase criminals? Strap on some six-guns like you’re from the rusting Roughs? That’s not what police work is like.”

“I’m well aware,” Marasi said dryly. “But thank you for the information. What did you find?”

He sighed, then tapped a folder with the back of his hand. “Rusting waste of my time,” he muttered.

Marasi took the folder and retreated between the filing cabinets. She wished it were only Miklin she had to deal with, but the two other constables made their opinions known with quiet sniffs of disdain. Marasi felt them glaring at her as she led MeLaan out of the room, clutching her folder.

“Why do they treat you like that?” MeLaan asked as they slipped out.

“It’s complicated.”

“People tend to be. Why do you *let* them treat you like that?”

“I’m working on it.”

“You want me to do something?” MeLaan said. “I could scare the cynicism right out of those people, show them you’ve got friends that—”

“No!” Marasi said. “No, please. It’s nothing I haven’t dealt with before.”

MeLaan followed her as she scurried to her desk outside of Aradel’s office. A lanky female constable stood there, one foot on Marasi’s chair, chatting with the man one desk over and sipping her tea. Marasi cleared her throat twice before the woman—Taudr was her name, wasn’t it?—finally looked at her, rolled her eyes, and moved out of the way.

Marasi settled down. MeLaan pulled over a chair. “You sure you don’t want me—”

“No,” Marasi said immediately, digging into the folder. She took a deep breath. “No, please.”

“I’m sure your friend Waxillium could come on over, fire off a few slugs, force them to stop being such sourlips.”

Oh, Survivor, no, Marasi thought, the image of it making her sick. But MeLaan obviously wasn’t going to let this go without an explanation.

“I’m beginning to realize that Waxillium is part of the reason why they treat me as they do,” Marasi said, opening the folder Miklin had prepared. “Life in the precinct follows a hierarchy. The sergeants start as corporals, work the streets, put in ten or fifteen years doing a hard beat and finally earn a promotion. The captains start out as lieutenants, and mostly come from noble stock. Once in a while, a sergeant works his or her way up. But everyone’s expected to put in their time at the bottom.”

“And you…”

“I skipped all that,” Marasi said. “I applied for—and got—an important position as Aradel’s chief aide. Waxillium makes that worse, as I’m associated with him. He’s like a whirlwind, blowing through and messing everything up. But he’s also good at what he does and a high-ranking nobleman, so nobody complains too loudly. I, however…”

“Not noble.”

“Not noble enough,” Marasi said. “My father is low-ranked, and I’m illegitimate. That makes me the available target, when Waxillium is off-limits.”

MeLaan leaned back in her chair and scanned the room. “Spook was always droning on about things like this—that bloodline shouldn’t matter as much as capability. You doing what you did should be impressive to everyone, not threatening. Hell, you said the place was egalitarian.”

“It is,” Marasi said. “That’s why I could get the job in the first place. But it doesn’t stop people from resenting me. I’m the way the world is changing, MeLaan, and change is frightening.”

“Huh,” the kandra said. “And the lower ranks just go along with this? You think they’d like you showing that someone can jump in line.”

“You don’t know a lot about human nature, do you?”

“Of course I do. I’ve studied, and imitated, dozens of people.”

“I suspect you understand individuals, then,” Marasi said. “The interesting thing about people is that while they might seem unique, they actually play into broad patterns. Historically, the working class has often been *more* resistant to change than the class oppressing them.”

“Really?” MeLaan asked.

Marasi nodded. She started to reach for some books on the small shelf beside her desk, but stopped. This wasn’t the time. In fact, they might be witnessing one of the exceptions to this rule, outside on the streets. And, like many upendings of the status quo, when it *did* happen, it could be violent. Like a steam engine’s boiler that had been plugged up, given no release until suddenly … everything exploded.

Nobody liked to realize they’d been had. People in Elendel believed they were living the good life—they’d been told all their lives that Harmony had blessed them with a rich and lavish land of bounty. You could listen to that sort of talk only so long before starting to wonder why all the incredible orchards were owned by someone else, while you had to work long hours just to feed your children.

Marasi dug into the contents of the folder, which listed the events surrounding the flooding to the east. MeLaan settled back in her seat. What a curious creature she was, sitting with head held high, meeting the glances of people who passed without the least concern about what anyone thought of her.

Miklin was annoying, but he hadn’t let his displeasure undermine his work, which was meticulous and thorough. He’d included constable reports on the dam breakage, a piece written by the engineer who had investigated the problem, and broadsheet clippings from Elendel regarding the disaster.

Most importantly, there was a transcript of the recent trial and execution of the farmer who had caused the flood. He claimed he’d wanted to ruin his neighbor’s harvest in an “accident.” But the saboteur had packed too much dynamite, and had blown a hole in the dam large enough to cause the entire thing to fail. Dozens dead, and crops destroyed throughout the region, causing grain shortages.

The defense had called witnesses who claimed that the saboteur, a man named Johnst, had been acting erratically. They claimed he was obviously mad. And the more she read, the more Marasi was convinced he *was* mad—if only because Bleeder was.

“Look at this,” Marasi said, handing a sheet to MeLaan.

The kandra took it and read, then grunted. “He couldn’t remember the names of his children at the trial?”

“Seems like good evidence that Johnst had been replaced, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes and no,” MeLaan said. “The old guard, they are *really* good at interrogating people and doing research before taking a new form. We don’t have to do that so much anymore—most of the forms we take are personas we’ve made up ourselves. If this *was* Bleeder, she must have been pressed for time.” MeLaan pointed at a section farther down the page. “This is much better proof, if you ask me.”

Marasi scooted over, looking at the paragraphs indicated.

> Report of the execution. Prisoner was hanged until dead. Rejected a final meal, and demanded it be “over with quickly.” Grave desecrated two nights later; suspected to be the work of those who lost family in the flood.

“Wow,” Marasi said, taking the paper back. She hadn’t reached that section yet. “Yeah. Escaping the grave, eh? She actually let them *bury* her?”

“Undoubtedly,” MeLaan said. “Paalm is nothing if not dedicated to her craft.”

“Then why forget the names of the children?”

MeLaan shook her head. “No idea.”

Either way, this seemed to be enough to take to Aradel. “Come on,” she said.

15

One thing that Wax’s life in the Roughs had taught him was that men would monetize anything. The first time he’d seen someone selling water, he’d been surprised. Who sold something that literally fell from the sky?

Now, more than twenty years later, he was surprised nobody in Elendel had found a way to charge a tax on collecting rainwater. If someone wanted it, you could charge for it. That went double for Allomancy, though there were some conservatives who decried the increasing commercialization of the Metallic Arts. Feruchemists for hire were much scarcer than Allomancers, perhaps because Terris traditions viewed their powers with such reverence.

Wax walked up the steps toward the building, which stood alone on the street in a fairly nice neighborhood of town, even if this was the darker end of the lane, so to speak. The place was two stories tall, and had the window shades drawn, though light inside gave them a warm glow. A black coach—with a silver crest, scraped across its face—was parked in the drive to the right.

The Soothing washed over him right as he reached the door. A calm, gentle feeling—like emotional anesthetic. Like someone had pressed a pillow against his emotions in an attempt to lovingly smother them.

Sloppy, he thought. *Should have brought my hat.* It had an aluminum lining, and Bleeder could have access to a spike letting her Soothe or Riot. Well, he'd have to fetch it later. He pushed into the building, entering a room dimly lit with lamps in red shades. A scattering of men and women lounged on cushions inside, smoking cigars or incense pipes, staring at the ceiling, which was painted like a stained-glass window in a pretty, abstract pattern.

Most businesses would be closed by this hour, but not the Soothing parlors. Visiting one was more expensive than a night at the pub, but had none of the side effects. Or to be more precise, it had different side effects. A woman in a matronly gown—and a hat, likely aluminum-lined—approached Wax, probably to take payment, but Wax flashed his credentials.

"If you think credentials will get you in free," the proprietor said, "then you must be new to the force."

Wax gave her a dry smile, tucking away the metal plate. She ran a low-grade Soothing parlor. While what she did wasn't illegal—amusingly, it was fine to manipulate people's emotions so long as they were paying for it—she'd be used to the constables checking up on her. Not only did these sorts of places tend to attract people who were hiding from something, it was very possible for a disreputable Soothing parlor to take advantage of its clients.

None of the people here matched Chapaou's description, but Soothing parlors often had more than one room. "Short man," Wax said, "balding. Known as Chapaou, but may not have given that name."

The proprietor nodded and gestured for Wax to follow as she crossed the room, weaving between the people lounging on the floor. The dim, smoky building should have left Wax jumpy—this was just the sort of place where accidents or ambushes happened—but the Soothing was difficult to pierce. It tore away the top layers of his concern, exposing those beneath—his worry for Wayne and Marasi. Beneath that, a surprising frustration—even anger—at God. Then those emotions too became as fluttering wings, leaving him hollow. Not calm, just empty.

He wanted to settle into one of the chairs, close his eyes, and let out a sigh of relaxation. Bleeder would wait. Surely she wouldn't try to kill again tonight. Why worry if she did? He probably couldn't stop her anyway.

He found he hated that sensation. These emotions were his; they were a core of his self. Taking them away didn't make him happy or help him forget. It just made him feel sick.

He picked up his pace, trying to urge the proprietor faster as they left the room with the cushions and stepped into a long hallway. Here, they passed several other rooms: A completely white chamber with people sitting cross-legged on the floor. Another that was completely black, no lights at all, the people inside barely visible. There was even a room with painted trees on the walls, the ground covered in thatch, like a Terris meeting hut. A lone man sat in this one, on a solitary chair, eyes closed.

The proprietor led Wax up a set of steps. Perhaps the man in the Terris room had been one of the Soothers—the parlor would have at least one in here somewhere, extending out a small bubble of Soothing. Parlors were supposed to have aluminum sheets in the walls to keep the emotional Allomancy contained from the neighborhood, but the rule wasn't uniformly enforced.

The proprietor led Wax to a small room on the second floor, unadorned save for a couch at the center for massages. Chapaou didn't lie on that. Instead, he paced by a latched window in the far wall, frustrating the masseuse who stood nearby with her arms folded. An old man sat in a chair by the wall. The metal vials in his pocket—visible to Wax as small, diffuse lines pointing at the suspended flakes—marked him as an Allomancer.

Wax raised his eyebrow. Chapaou had paid for a private session. Where had he found that kind of money? The coach driver stopped in place, looking toward Wax. His eyes flicked toward the guns at Wax's hips, then he fell to his knees, weeping.

The aged Soother rose with audible cracks from his joints. "I've done what I can, Mistress Halex," he said to the proprietor. "But this man doesn't need Allomancy. He needs a physician."

"He's yours," Mistress Halex said to Wax. "Get him out of here. He's disturbing my people."

Wax crossed the room to kneel beside Chapaou. The short man shivered, holding his legs. "Chapaou," Wax said. "Look at me."

Chapaou turned toward him.

"What's the name of your dog?" Wax asked.

"My … I don't have a dog. He died a few years back."

Good enough. This wasn’t Bleeder in disguise, unless she’d thought to interrogate a random cabdriver about his pets before killing him and taking his shape.

“What’s wrong?” Wax said. “Why are you here?”

“To forget what I saw.”

“Soothing doesn’t work like that,” Wax said. “It doesn’t take your memories.”

“But it should make me feel better, right?”

“Depends on the emotions you’re feeling,” Wax said, “and the skill of the Soother.” He held the man by the shoulder. “What did you see, Chapaou?”

The man blinked reddened eyes. “I saw … myself.”

* * *

Aradel wasn’t in his office, of course. That place was there, as he put it, “for giving house lords somewhere to sit when they come to complain at me.”

Marasi found him on the roof of the constabulary offices listening to reports from the two precinct Coinshots who had been scouting the city. Marasi politely waited with MeLaan and several constable lieutenants standing nearby, and was able to hear most of the latest report. *Thousands still on the streets, my lord. They’re congregating at pubs. Not going home …*

Aradel stood with one booted foot up on the short wall around the rooftop as he took the reports. Mist curled around each Coinshot in a distinct vortex; it responded to the use of Allomancy. Finally, Aradel dismissed the two. They weren’t true constables—more contractors. Their loyalties would be to their houses. Or in some cases to their pocketbooks.

As they left—jumping off the building—the constable-general turned to the waiting lieutenants. “Get the men ready to clear out the pubs,” he said softly.

“Sir?” one of the women asked.

“We’re going to close them down,” Aradel said, pointing. “First on the promenades, then work down the smaller streets. We can’t start until I get authority from the governor to institute martial law in the octant, but I want the constables ready to move as soon as we have word.”

The lieutenants ran to obey. Aradel glanced toward Marasi, and she thought she saw something of his ancestor in him, a soldier who had died a martyr during the days of the Ascendant Warrior. In another era, would this man have been a field general rather than a policeman?

"What do you have for me, Lieutenant Colms?" he said, waving her forward. MeLaan lingered by the stairwell down, hands in her trouser pockets.

"Our assassin, sir," Marasi said, proffering the folder. "She dug her way out of her own grave after being executed for causing the floods in the east. They found the bones nearby a few days later, and called it desecration of the grave. After all, why would they guess that one of the holy Faceless Immortals had been inhabiting the body of a murderer and criminal?"

Aradel breathed out quietly in a hiss. Shadows moved beneath the streetlights, despite the hour, on the promenade behind him. "So this is all her doing?"

"Pardon, sir," Marasi said, "but I'd say this is rather the fault of the city's unpleasant working conditions. That said, Bleeder is most certainly shoving it along. She wanted this city to be on the brink of cracking when she made her move."

"Ruin…" Aradel whispered. "In the face of that, it seems almost trivial whether the governor is corrupt or not, doesn't it?"

"I suppose that depends on whom you ask." Shouts rose from the street down below; a group of men passing along the canal, speaking riotously to one another. She couldn't make out their words, just their tone.

"I still want proof," Aradel said. "Not to diminish your efforts, Lieutenant. But I'm not going to jump at wraiths in the mist unless I can see for myself. That goes for the governor too. Keep your eyes open. If you can find me something concrete, we'll use it once this all blows over. And I still want some kind of proof regarding your supernatural assassin."

"I understand, sir," Marasi said, nodding toward MeLaan, lit by the lanterns hanging on poles near the door to the stairs. "And I have some proof for you there. But it would be best if we could do this in private."

Aradel slowly shifted his weight backward, lowering his foot from the top of the parapet he'd been leaning on. He glanced at Marasi, who nodded.

"Below," he said to the two remaining constables attending him. Junior corporals, for message running. They obeyed, and once they were gone, Aradel crossed the distance to MeLaan. "I hope," he said, after clearing his throat, "that my questions aren't offensive, er, Your Grace."

“Sincere inquiries never offend, human,” MeLaan said, “for it is thy duty to seek truth. True questions return only truth.” Her skin shimmered, growing transparent as it had before, but somehow also giving off a kaleidoscopic sheen. She spread her hands to the sides, and her blouse somehow split and slid down her shoulders, exposing a transparent torso with an emerald skeleton that glittered in the lamplight.

Marasi blinked. Well, *that* hadn’t been what she’d been expecting. Beside her, Aradel inhaled sharply, then didn’t seem to be breathing at all as he took in the sight. MeLaan’s head—completely transparent—cocked, and she looked down at them with a maternal cast.

“Speak,” she whispered.

“What…” Aradel cleared his throat. “Is what Constable Colms has told me true? Could one of your kind really be behind this?”

“Paalm is a lost soul,” MeLaan said, “tortured by a broken mind and a twisted spirit. Yes, she is of us, human. Thy task is not easy, but we shall aid thee in thy desperation.”

“Great,” Aradel said. “I guess … I guess that’s the confirmation I needed.” He hesitated. “Could you, by any chance, put in a good word for me with Harmony?”

“Thy deeds are thine own good words, human,” MeLaan said. “And thy God knows of them. Go and protect this city. Worry not for thyself, but instead for thy fellows.”

“Right, right,” Aradel said. “I’ll just be about it, then. Unless there’s anything more you can tell me…”

“Thy snoring,” MeLaan said, “is rather loud.”

“I … What?”

“It doth be like unto an hundred angry koloss,” MeLaan said, “in the middle of a rockslide. Lo, and it doth come near to waking the dead.”

“Right…” Aradel said.

“Be on thy way, human,” MeLaan said.

“As commanded. Lieutenant Colms, a moment?” He bowed his head to MeLaan, walking around her to the side, and had trouble tearing his eyes off her. Granted, Marasi had trouble doing the same. MeLaan was overwhelming even when she wasn’t transparent and half naked. MeLaan nodded Marasi onward. No need to come back up for her.

When they were halfway down the stairs, Aradel let out a deep breath. “Well, that was strange.”

“I did warn you,” Marasi noted.

“That you did. The bit about snoring … a metaphor, I assume. But for what? The constables, we’re too loud, perhaps?” He nodded to himself. “We’re supposed to serve the people, but the complaints of brutality, and of officers ordering people around as if they were lords … Yes, I can see. I’ll need to make some changes. Do you think that’s what she meant?”

“I don’t know,” Marasi said carefully. “Meeting her does tend to affect one in profound ways.”

“Very true.” Aradel hesitated on the steps, turning as if he longed to return up above. He held himself back. “The question I had earlier remains. We’ve got an immortal killer out there, potentially trying to overthrow the government. How in Preservation do we fight something like that?”

“You don’t,” Marasi said. “Lord Waxillium will handle the kandra. We should focus on keeping the city from exploding.”

Aradel nodded. “I want you to do something for me.”

“Sir?” They still stood in the stairwell, lit by a solitary electric light above them.

“You mention Lord Ladrian,” Aradel said. “He seems to trust you, Lieutenant.”

“We have become good friends over the last year.”

“He’s a wildcard, Lieutenant,” Aradel said. “I appreciate the work he does, but his methods … let’s just say I wouldn’t mind having a little more information on what he’s doing and when.”

“You’re asking me to spy on him.”

Aradel shrugged. Another man might have been embarrassed to be confronted with it so bluntly, but he didn’t seem so. “I won’t lie to you, Colms. I think you can be a resource for this department in more ways than one. It’s my job to see that the law in this octant is served, and I’ll feel a hell of a lot better if I know what Lord Ladrian is doing. If only so I can get the proper warrants—and if necessary, apologies—ready.”

“I see,” Marasi said.

Aradel waited for something more. She could practically hear the implication. *You’re a constable, Lieutenant. This is your job. Do as you are assigned.*

“You could just ask him,” she said. “He’s been deputized. He is technically under your jurisdiction.”

"And you don't think I've tried? He always promises a report. If I'm lucky, that consists of a letter telling me where he left a suspect hanging by his ankles—do you remember that one?—or a quick rundown at a party of something he's hunting, if only so he can ask me for the loan of some resources. I don't mean to turn you into his chaperone, but honestly, a little more information would be *wonderful*."

Marasi sighed. "I'll write you a weekly report. More frequently if an investigation is ongoing, as it is now. But I will inform him that I'm doing so."

"Great. Fantastic." Aradel started down the stairs again, stepping quickly and speaking almost as fast. "Get to the governor's place and tell him I need an executive order for martial law tonight so I can clear the pubs. Suggest he send one to each of the octants. Then check in on your friend Ladrian and tell me anything he's learned about this immortal who thinks she can bring down our city."

He reached the floor below and strode out into the main chamber, shouting for a report on the number of constables they'd been able to call up for duty this night. Marasi followed more slowly, legs feeling like they bore hundred-pound bracers.

You can be a resource for this department in more ways than one.…

She reached the ground floor and walked out the precinct's back door. She'd always known that her involvement with Waxillium had helped her obtain this job. If she hadn't joined his hunt for Miles Hundredlives, she'd never have gained enough notability. That said, she'd assumed her understanding of historical crime rates, her letters of recommendation, and her interview had been more important.

Was that even the case? Had Aradel given her the job instead of someone like Reddi because she knew Waxillium? Did her studies even matter?

She settled with her back against the wall, waiting for MeLaan. Rusts … did everything always *have* to be about Waxillium? Of course, thinking that made her feel like a child, jealous that someone else had more blocks than she did.

MeLaan strolled into the alleyway a short time later, disturbing the mists. "Well?" MeLaan asked. "How did I do?"

"We shall aid thee in thy desperation?" Marasi asked.

"Hey, it's what he expected."

"Not what *I* expected."

MeLaan sniffed. “I can be divine when I need to be. I’ve had a *long* time to practice.”

“Then why don’t you use the act around me and the others?”

“Who says this isn’t the act?” MeLaan said. She met Marasi’s eyes. “Perhaps my duty as one of Harmony’s servants is to show people what they need to see, whatever will bring them the most peace.”

Marasi felt cold, suddenly, a shiver running through her. Not at the words, but at the look in MeLaan’s eyes, which had faded to a faint translucence. As if … in reminder?

Then MeLaan threw her head back and started laughing. “Nah, I’m just rusting you, kid. I don’t show you that side because it’s too hard to keep a straight face while talking with all those ‘thee’s and ‘whatfore’s.”

“Hence the snoring wisecrack?” Marasi said.

“Yeah. I had to check on the guy when Harmony was first looking for Paalm. He snores like a *steam engine*, that one. Anyway, where to now?”

“The governor’s mansion,” Marasi said.

“Along we go, then,” MeLaan said, striding toward the exit of the alleyway.

* * *

“We pulled to a stop,” Chapaou said, hunched up next to his carriage in the mists outside the Soother’s place. “And I’d been hearing things inside the coach. I didn’t like how he’d come out of that church, with hands all red.”

Wax knelt in the back of the coach, listening while he carefully unwrapped a bundle of black cloth. A lantern hung on the side of the coach, giving him light, but also turning the mists into a bloom of illumination. He could still feel the Soother’s touch from the nearby building, but it was far less pronounced now. He felt almost like himself. That was both good and bad, for there was nothing to hold back his sense of revulsion as he unwrapped the bloody mallet that had been used to pound the spikes into Father Bin.

“I shouldn’t have looked into the coach,” Chapaou said. “He told me not to look, you know? But I couldn’t help it. So I turned softly and peeked in the coachman’s slot, the one they have so you can see if the person inside is ripping the upholstery or whatnot.

“I found I hadn’t been carrying a man, but a monster. A mistwraith, with bones and sinew exposed, and a face of stretched muscle and grinning teeth.

It looked at me, all smiles, and scrambled up toward the hole. It pressed that exposed eye against the slot, and then it *changed*. It *changed*. Skin growing over its face, like mine. A twisted, broken version of me."

He started weeping again. Wax unrolled bones from the bundle, the corpse of the Pathian whom Bleeder had imitated in order to kill Father Bin. Bleached, picked clean, and under them a pile of cloth. Pathian robes? Yes, the colors were right.

"Hands all red…" Chapaou whispered.

"You ran, after that?" Wax asked, lining up the bones carefully.

"No, I drove," Chapaou said. "I whipped the horses forward, bearing that demonspawn in my coach. A driver for Ironeyes himself. What good would it do to run? It had my soul. Harmony … it *has my soul*."

"No," Wax said. "It is a trickster, a false face, Chapaou. It was a twisted version of yourself, you say?" MeLaan had said that older kandra could often approximate a face without having the right bones, but it was always noticeable.

"Yeah." The man huddled down lower in the alleyway. "I know what you think, lawman. I killed that priest tonight, didn't I? I went mad, and I killed him, and those bloody hands are mine. Shoulda killed myself, jumped off that bridge…"

"No," Wax said. "You've been taken in by a charlatan, Chapaou. It wasn't you."

The man just whimpered.

Wax continued, methodically laying out the evidence, though a part of him wondered what good it would do. Did traditional detective work have any place in a fight against a creature like this? How did you fight mythology with a microscope? Harmony … what if he *did* find a clue? If he chased her down? Could he even defeat something like this?

He stared at the bones, then shook his head. He would send for a crime-scene team to look this over. He needed to get to the governor's mansion and check in.

Wait, he thought, then leaned forward. There, on the hem of the robe. What was that? He shielded the lantern, causing Chapaou to groan and huddle down farther.

With the lantern dimmed, Wax spotted it better. The corner of the robe's hem *glowed* with a soft blue light, easy to miss. Wax reached down, taking a substance off the robe and rubbing it between his fingers. A powder of some sort? What kind of powder gave off its own light, faint though it was?

“Did you see anything glowing back here, Chapaou?” he asked, turning toward the man. Wax had to unshield the lantern to get him to respond. Even then, the only reply he got was a confused shake of the head.

“Where did you drive the coach?” Wax asked.

“Lestib Square,” Chapaou whispered. “Where I’d been told to drop the creature off. Then I squeezed my eyes shut and waited. It … it climbed up to me, as it left. Hands on my shoulders, head beside mine, cheeks touching. I could feel the blood, though it left none staining my shirt. It … it *whispered* to me, lawman. ‘I will make you free.’ When I opened my eyes it had gone, leaving those bones in the passenger compartment along with a small pile of coins. I thought for sure I’d gone mad.”

Wax downed an extra vial of metals to refill his stores, then dried the vial out and took a sample of the dust. Lestib Square, named after the Lord Mistborn. It was worryingly close to the governor’s mansion. “Don’t worry. I’m on the thing’s trail. I intend to stop it.”

“It said it would make me free,” Chapaou said. “If I’m not mad, then that means … that means that thing was *real*.”

“It is,” Wax said.

“Honestly, sir, I’d rather be crazy.”

“Eh,” Wax said, rising and pushing Chapaou toward his coach. “The thing probably doesn’t want you dead anyway.”

“Probably?”

“No way to tell for certain,” Wax said, checking his ammunition. “But I’d bet money against it—at least, it no more wants you dead than it wants everyone in the city dead. Maybe. Not sure yet what its endgame is.”

Chapaou looked sick. Damn. He was sure that last part had been comforting.

“Go home,” Wax said, then tossed the man a few banknotes. “Or go find a hotel. Get some sleep. She isn’t going to come for you.”

She had much bigger game to hunt.

or one-Boxing-fifty for two.

you could be selling whiskey at forty clips a bottle."

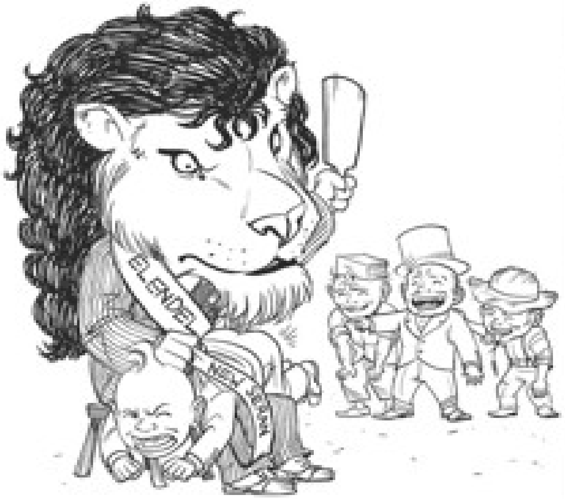
clips a box. You'll be glad you stayed for PECTIN-ADE!

GUEST EDITORIAL:

THE NUISANCE OF NEGLIGENT COINSHOTS!

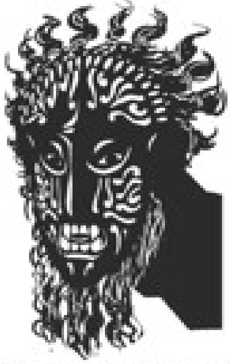
In the last sixteen months I have replaced three lamposts, an iron gate, and two steeple spires, all at my Madion Ways house. My residence in the 6th Octant, much nearer the Hub, has needed twice that attention due to it being on the main route of Coinshot couriers. Motor cars, carriages, bronze statues. None of these is safe from similar fates. Must our fine neighborhoods look like a return to the World of Ash?

No! Let us take back our dignity! *(Continued on Back.)*



AND IT'S BEDTIME WITHOUT SUPPER, TOO.

VISITORS from other WORLDS



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"I was lost in the mountains south of the Southern Roughs," said Sauvage. "And my fellow travellers had either left me or died. That's when I came upon a mountain pool of the most perfect blue, fed by the melting snows of the heights. Harmony, but I thought I'd reached Paradise."

As twilight struck early, as it is wont to do in the mountains, Sauvage saw a hunched figure by the pool. "Just a shadow, really," she said. "Piercing eyes, and a face like some otherworldly beast from one of those hideous pulp stories. I regret to say I hadn't the courage to engage this Visitor. Instead, its horrible visage struck right at my heart. I let preservation instinct take over and ran for an hour before making camp elsewhere."

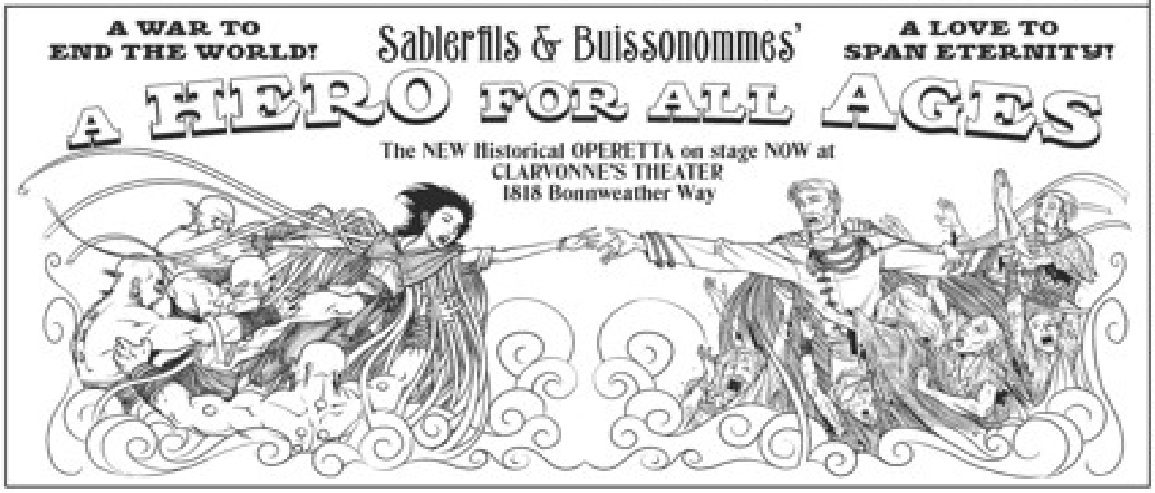
(More on Back, Column 4.)

The Sinister Soiree!

I described my assailant as wearing a striped white suit, but that is not as specific as it may seem. In Elendel, someone dressed as described would stick out like afternoon tea among koloss, but in New Seran the men run about in such vibrant suits that one would almost think they are all performers late for the circus. So I will be more specific. The gunman also wore mustaches waxed straight horizontal to a perfect point. The women on both sides of him stood back not only because he had brandished a gun, but also because they feared losing eyes to the sharp and glistening facial hair.

I burned what little tin reserves I had left. (You will recall that I detailed the episode last week in "A Sport of Spirits" where I'd been forced to flare most of my tin to counteract the effects of winning a gentlemanly impromptu wine-sipping contest earlier in the evening.)

"Stand down, sir," I said, cursing myself for leaving Glint in my outer jacket taken by the servant when I'd entered the party. Had I become so soft since leaving the Roughs that I felt comfortable enough without Glint on my very person? Never! Unconsciously I knew that even without my trusty sidearm I was a match



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Wax perched on an electricity pylon, overlooking the governor's mansion—a clean white building, brightly lit in the mists by floodlights. Those didn't shine so strongly every night, and their brightness tonight seemed to indicate that Innate was worried. The crowds were not dispersing. Men roamed the streets; there seemed to be *more* of them than there had been earlier, though the clock had struck midnight soon after Wax had left the Soothing parlor.

He'd stopped by his house to rebind his arm wound, chew down some painkillers, and pick up some supplies: his hat, his short-barreled shotgun, and his thigh holster. He'd considered sending someone for Lord Harms, but honestly, Wax wanted him safe where Bleeder couldn't use the man against him. Better that he stay hidden on his rooftop. In fact, he'd been half tempted to go fetch Steris and drop her somewhere similar. Time was short, unfortunately. He had to trust that the constables watching her would keep her hidden.

From there, he'd walked the streets a short time, listening. He'd overheard anger at the government. Vitriol for the Pathians. Those complaints were bad enough, but mixed with them was a more disturbing trend. Anger, but with no focus. General discontent. The grumbling of men over their beers, of youths out on the street throwing rocks at cats. Hiding amid it all was a murderer, like a lion in the grass.

At least the governor's mansion looked calm. He'd come fearing the worst, a strike on Innate while he was away. *She's got me pinned,* Wax thought with dissatisfaction, as the breeze rustled his mistcoat. *I can't stay and protect the governor because I have to follow leads and try to figure out her plan. But I can't be as effective in that hunt because I keep worrying that I'm leaving Innate exposed.*

Could he convince the governor to hide? Beneath his feet, electricity ran like an invisible river through the suspended cables. Spirits that moved like Allomancers in the sky, hopping from building to building …

Ah, lawman, a voice intruded upon his thoughts like a nail into a board. *There you are.*

Wax reached to his waist for Vindication. Where? This had to mean Bleeder was close, right? Watching somewhere?

Do you know, the voice said, *about the body's remarkable defenses? Inside, there are tiny bits of you that men never see. Even surgeons don't know of them, for they're too small. It takes a refined taste to distinguish them, know them. What is it that your friend likes to say? Ain't nobody what knows the cow better than the butcher?*

Wax dropped down from his perch, slowing himself by Pushing on a discarded bottle cap. Mists churned around him, drawn by his Allomancy.

If a tiny invader enters your blood, Bleeder said, *the entire* body *begins to spin around it, to fight it, to find it and eliminate it. Like a thousand fingers of mist, like a legion of soldiers all too small to see. But what is very interesting is when the body turns upon itself, and these soldiers run wild. Free …*

"Where are you?" Wax asked loudly.

Close, Bleeder said. *Watching. You, and the governor. I will need to kill him, you know.*

"Can we talk?" Wax asked a little softer.

Isn't that what we're doing?

Wax turned, walking in the night. Either Bleeder would have to follow—which might let him catch motions in the mists—or he'd get far enough away that she couldn't hear to reply to him, which would tell him which direction to search in.

"Are you going to try to kill me?" Wax asked.

What good would it do to kill you?

"So you want games."

No. Bleeder sounded resigned. *No games.*

"What, then?" Wax asked. "Why bother with all of this showmanship?"

I'll free them. Every one of them. I'll take this people, and I'll open their eyes.

"How?"

What are you, Waxillium? Bleeder asked.

"A lawman," Wax said immediately.

That's the coat you're wearing right now, but it's not who you are. I know. God knows I've seen the truth in you.

"Tell me, then," Wax said, still walking through the mists.

I don't think I can. I might be able to show you.

Bleeder didn't seem to have trouble hearing, though Wax had softened his voice. Allomancy? Or did she just have the ability to make ears that worked better than human ones? He kept searching. Perhaps one of those dark windows in the government building nearby? Wax headed that way. "Is that why you're targeting the governor, then?" he asked. "You want to bring him down, free the people from the government's oppression?"

You know he's just another pawn.

"I don't know that."

I wasn't talking to you that time, Waxillium.

He hesitated in the mists. The office building loomed before him, the windows a hundred hollow eyes. Most of those windows were closed—a common practice at night. No need to invite the mists in. Religion could say what it wished, and people believed, mostly. But the mists still made them uncomfortable.

There, Wax thought, picking out an open window on the second floor.

Very good, Bleeder said, and Wax saw something shift just inside the window, ambient light barely sufficient to let him discern it. *Ever the detective.*

"I'm not much of one, actually," Wax said. "In the Roughs, you solve fewer cases with investigation than with a good pair of guns."

That's a fun lie, Bleeder said. *Do you tell that one at parties to youths who've read too many stories about the Roughs? They don't like hearing about interrogating family members of a man gone bad? Tracking down* *gunsmiths to see who fixed an outlaw's rifle? Digging through an old campfire after days spent on the road?*

"How do you know about things like that?" Wax asked.

I do my homework. It's a kandra thing, which I assume MeLaan explained. Whatever you claim, you're a good investigator. Maybe an excellent one. Even if you are, by definition, a dog chasing its own tail.

Wax walked right up to the base of the building, the mist thinning between him and Bleeder, who skulked just inside the window about ten feet up. Her face, though enveloped by the shadows, seemed wrong to Wax. Shaped oddly.

"Have you asked him?" Bleeder whispered from above, barely audible in the night. She had a rasping, dry voice, like the one in his head.

"Who?"

"Harmony. Have you asked why he didn't save Lessie? A whisper at the right time, telling you not to split up. A warning in the back of your mind, telling you not to prowl down that tunnel, but instead circle around behind? You could have saved Lessie so easily with his help."

"Don't speak her name," Wax hissed.

"He's supposed to be God. He could have snapped his fingers and made Tan drop dead on the spot. He didn't. Have you asked why?"

Vindication was in Wax's hand a moment later, pointing up toward that window. His other hand felt at his gunbelt for the pouch that held the syringes.

Bleeder chuckled. "Ever quick with the gun. If you speak to Harmony again, ask him. Did he know the effect Lessie had on you, that she was what kept you out in the Roughs? Did he know, perhaps, that you'd never return here—where he needed you—as long as she was alive? Did he, perhaps, *want* her to die?"

Wax fired.

Not to hit Bleeder. He just needed to hear a *crack* in the night. That sound, so familiar, of breaking air. The bullet left a trail in the mist, and the wall beside Bleeder popped, scattering flakes of brick.

Rusts … he was shaking.

"I'm sorry," Bleeder whispered. "For what I have to do. Cleaning the wound is often more painful than the cut itself. You will see, and understand, once you are free."

"No, we—"

The mists churned. Wax stumbled back, swinging his gun toward something that had passed in a blur, leaving a corridor of swirling mist.

Bleeder. Moving with Feruchemical speed.

Toward the governor.

Wax cursed, swinging Vindication behind himself and planting a bullet in the ground, then Pushing in a powerful burst. He launched through the mists toward the blazing light of the governor's grounds, sweeping over the gates, startling a small flock of ravens, which scattered into the air around him.

Two shots rang out in the night. As Wax crossed the grounds, he spotted Bleeder on the mansion's front steps, wearing a body-length scarlet coat. The guards at the front doors lay dead at her feet. In the glow of the electric lights, he could see what was wrong with Bleeder's face now—she wore a black-and-white mask. The Marksman's mask, but twisted, broken up one side.

She ducked into the building, not using her speed any longer. Wax landed beside the bodies—he didn't have time to check them for life—and growled as he shoved into the building, gun out, and checked right, then left. The house steward screamed, dropping a tray of tea in the entryway as Bleeder skidded across the floor and into the next room.

Wax followed, the main door ripping from its frame and flying out behind him into the night as he Pushed against it and its hinges to cross the room in a half run, half skim. He burst into the next chamber—a sitting room—with Vindication out, spinning the cylinder to one of the gun's special hazekiller rounds. A Thug shot, extra-heavy slug, built to deliver as much force as possible.

The room he entered was decorated with the kind of perfect furniture you found only in a house that had too many rooms. According to the blueprint he'd been given, under it would be the saferoom.

Still the gun, Bleeder said in his mind as she leaped over a sofa, heading toward the wall, which hid the steps down to the saferoom. *Useless. I cannot be killed with that.*

Wax raised Vindication and sighted, then fired, Pushing the bullet forward in a burst of extra speed. It hit Bleeder as she landed.

Right in the ankle.

The bone shattered and Bleeder collapsed as she tried to put weight on her ankle. She turned toward Wax, lips raised in a snarl visible through the broken side of the mask.

Wax put a bullet through the eyehole in the mask.

This is meaningless—

He strode forward, shooting her in the hand as she tried to raise her gun. Wax pulled out the syringe, ready to Push it toward her skin, but she growled and became a blur. Wax tried to follow that blur—but at that moment, the side of the room burst open, revealing the hidden stairwell. A group of men in black suits and shotguns piled out, frantic. The governor's special security.

Wax dove for cover as they started firing. He didn't catch much of what happened next, as he put his back to the side of a thick chair. Bleeder moved among the men, firing. They tried to fire back, doing more damage to their friends than they did to her.

It was over by the time the report from the first gunshot had faded in Wax's ears. Men lay groaning and bleeding on the floor, and Bleeder was through the hole and heading down the steps. Wax set his jaw and Pushed himself across the room. He landed, skidding on blood, and leaped into the stairwell. Another Push sent him soaring down the steps.

Gunshots resounded in the narrow confines of the stairwell, coming from just ahead. Wax slowed himself with a shot forward into the ground, landing beside a final handful of guards who lay bleeding on the floor.

The kandra stood alone before the door to the saferoom. She looked at Wax, smiled, and became a blur.

But her speed only lasted a fraction of a second. Soon after she'd begun tapping her metalmind, she slowed back down.

Wax caught sight of her just as she unlocked the door to the governor's saferoom, using a key she shouldn't have. She pulled the door open with a flourish, then glanced back at Wax, shaking her head. She obviously thought she was still a blur moving with incredible speed. And she was.

Wax had simply joined her.

One of the fallen bodies stirred, and Wayne pushed back his hat, showing a grin. Wax raised his hands, a gun in each, and was rewarded by an expression of utter shock on Bleeder's face. She'd regrown her eye, though blood still streamed down the front of her mask. As he had chased her, talked to her, she'd always seemed fully in control.

Until this moment.

Wax blasted away with both guns. That wasn't usually a good idea, at least if you wanted to hit anything, but they were barely ten feet apart—and besides, he was inside a speed bubble. His bullets would refract when leaving sped-up time, and so aiming was of questionable value anyway.

At a time like this, you didn't want to be precise. You wanted to be thorough. Steris would be proud.

He fired in a cacophony, empting both weapons. He took advantage of Bleeder's shock, dropping his guns and pulling his other Sterrion out of its under-arm holster and unloading it. His short-barreled shotgun, from the holster on his thigh, followed, belching slugs and thunder as Wax strode to the edge of the speed bubble.

After reaching the rim, the bullets deflected out into normal time, moving painfully slowly. But less than a foot separated Bleeder and the edge of Wayne's bubble. Wax dropped the shotgun and pulled out one of the syringes again, and shoved it toward her, Pushing on the metal, hoping against hope that—stunned from the gunfire—she wouldn't notice it coming.

As the kandra turned to run, the first bullet hit. Others followed in a storm. Half missed, but Wax had fired almost two dozen shots. Many punched into Bleeder, who dropped her Feruchemical speed as they caught her. She moved lethargically, trying to escape the hail of bullets, sprays of blood bursting silently into the air, like the seeds blown from a dandelion.

She stumbled against the doorframe, and one of the shotgun slugs hit the back of her head, ripping a hole through her face and breaking off the mask. She sagged, gripping the doorframe, draped in her red cloak.

The needle flew from Wax's Push, spinning in the air, but it—like the bullets—had been deflected by the edge of the speed bubble. It impaled itself into the wood of the doorframe just inches from Bleeder.

She righted herself a second later, and sped up again, wounds vanishing. She didn't look at him as her back straightened and she strode through the door. She did flip the needle off the frame, sending it toppling in slow motion toward the ground.

Wax dug a handful of rounds from the pouch on his belt, then leaped out of the speed bubble. He felt an immediate *lurch*—as if the world had been upended—and heard a faint popping sound. The nausea hit him like a punch to the face, but he was ready for it. He'd ducked out of speed bubbles before.

A single gunshot sounded from the saferoom.

He crossed the distance to the door in a rush, throwing the cartridges in front of himself, ready to Push on the ones that he might need to hit Bleeder. Once inside, however, he let the rounds drop to the ground. Bleeder wasn't in the room; an open door at the back led out, presumably through a tunnel to the grounds above.

The plush saferoom—round and rimmed with bookshelves—had a wet bar on one end and was lit by comfortable reading lamps. The governor knelt on the floor, holding a bleeding Drim, frantically trying to stanch the blood coming from the bodyguard's neck.

Wax dashed across the room, stopping at the door into the escape tunnel.

"Lawman!" Innate cried. "Help. Please … oh, Harmony. Help!"

Wax hesitated, peering into that empty, dark tunnel. He was reminded of another one like it, dusty and shored up by beams at the sides. Both a tomb and a stage …

Behind, Wayne stumbled into the room, then scrambled to help Innate. Wax remained by the door into the tunnel, rolling a few rounds between his fingers.

"He saved me," Innate said, weeping. By this point, he was drenched in Drim's blood. He'd pulled off his shirt, trying to use it to stanch the blood. "He leaped into the way right as the assassin shot," Innate said. "Tell me you can … Please…"

"He's gone, mate," Wayne said, settling back.

"Other casualties upstairs, Wayne," Wax said, pointing. With reluctance, he shut the door to the escape tunnel. He couldn't give chase, not and leave the governor alone here.

Wayne rushed out of the room to check on the men who had been shot upstairs. Wax walked over to the governor, who knelt before his bodyguard's corpse. He'd never seen Innate look so human as he did at that moment, shoulders slumped, head bowed. Exhausted, wrung-out. Could anyone fake that?

He checked anyway. "Leavening on sand," Wax said.

Innate looked up at him, eyes unfocused. Wax's heart skipped a beat, but then the governor sighed. "Bones without soup."

He knew the passphrase. This was really Innate.

Wax knelt beside the governor, looking over Drim's corpse. Annoying though the man had been at times, he had not deserved this. "I'm sorry."

"She stopped moving at a blur," Innate said, his voice strained. "She appeared inside, gun out, but seemed angry about something. Drim leaped for me right before she shot. She was gone a second later. Surely she could have paused to finish me off, rather than running."

"She obtained Feruchemical powers only two weeks ago," Wax said. "That time frame greatly limits how much speed she can have stored up, and moving as fast as she has been must have drained her metalmind quickly. She needed to escape before it ran out."

Of course, there could be another reason. She might have just wanted to frighten them, and the governor. To prod him to do something. But what? She said she intended to kill him, but not until the time was right.

Why? What was the plan?

"So she's flawed," Innate said. "She can be beaten."

"Of course she can," Wax said. He looked down at the corpse, and the floor stained red. *But at what cost?* He took a deep breath. "I want you to leave the city."

"No."

"That's stupidity," Wax snapped. "She *will* be back."

"Have you looked out there, lawman?" Innate said, waving a bloody hand in a vaguely upward direction. "Have you seen what's happening in this city?"

"You can't do anything about that tonight."

"I most certainly can." Innate stood. "I'm the leader of this city; I'm not going to run away. If anything, I need to be seen—need to meet with the chief instigators of this movement, if any can be found. I need to address the crowds, prepare a speech—I need to gather my cabinet, and with them make sure that there's still a city here in the morning." He pointed at Wax. "You *stop* this creature, Ladrian. I don't have a bodyguard any longer. I'm in your hands."

He strode out then. Whatever else he thought of the man, Wax had to respect Innate's grit.

You stop this creature.…

Wax glanced at the syringe, still lying on the floor near the doorframe. So close. If it had hit, he might have been able to depress the metal plunger and send the liquid into her veins. Feeling powerless, he fetched that syringe and brought it back to Drim's corpse, dead with a bullet right in the neck. Wax plunged the syringe into the corpse's arm and emptied it into the flesh.

Nothing happened. He hadn't expected it to—it seemed very implausible that Bleeder would have managed to get Drim's face on and fool the governor this way. But it still made Wax feel more comfortable.

He stumbled to his feet. Rusts, he was tired. Why *hadn't* she killed the governor? There was more to this.

Wayne peeked in. "Two guards might make it. We have a surgeon helpin' them now."

"Good," Wax said. "Wait for me upstairs."

Wayne nodded, ducking back out. Wax instead walked to the escape route and pulled open the door. He lit a candle and stepped up the slope, cautious, hand on his gun. What did undermining the governor, inciting a riot against the Pathians, and Wax's own "freedom" have to do with one another? What was he missing?

He didn't find Bleeder in the tunnel, though halfway up it he found her red cloak. She'd tossed it, bloodied, to the side. There, scrawled on the wall, was a crude picture shaped like a man, drawn with a fingernail into the wood.

Dabs of dried blood marked the figure's eyes, and another marked its mouth. The words scrawled beneath in blood gave Wax a chill.

I rip out his tongue to stop the lies.

I stab out his eyes to hide from his gaze.

You will be free.

17

About a half hour after Bleeder's attack, Wayne walked into the governor's fancy washroom. Only in his head it wasn't the washroom. He just knew to call it that here.

You see, Wayne had figured out the code.

Rich folks, they had this *code*. All of them knew it, and they used it like a new language to weed out everyone who didn't belong.

Regular folk, they called something after what it was.

You'd say, "What's that, Kell?"

And they'd say, "That? That there's the crapper."

And you'd reply, "What do you do with it?"

And they'd say, "Well, Wayne, that's where you put your crap."

It made sense. But rich folk, they had a different word for the crapper. They'd call it a "commode" or a "washroom." That way, when someone asked for the crapper, they knew it was a person they needed to oppress.

Wayne did his business and spat his gum into the bowl before flushing. It felt good to be wearing his own hat again, dueling canes at his waist. He'd spent a good hour or two wearing the clothing and false face of a guard for Innate. Horribly uncomfortable, that.

He wiped his sniffly nose and washed his hands, drying them on towels embroidered with Innate's name. He was *that* worried people would run off with his towels? Well, the joke was on him. Wayne was perfectly happy to wipe up dirt with the governor's name. He tucked the towel into his pocket, and left in trade a few mints he'd taken from the bar.

He wandered out from there, peeking into the room where the governor was holding a meeting with all kinds of important folks, the type who called the crapper "the facilities."

You know, he thought, *maybe I have it wrong. Maybe it's not code. Maybe they're just so familiar with what comes out of their arses, normal words aren't specific enough.* Like how the Terris language had seven different words for iron.

He nodded to himself. A new theory. Wax was gonna love this one. Wayne passed into the room with the couches, where the guards had been gunned down. Wax stood inside with an envelope, into which he dropped something small and metallic. He sealed it, then handed it to a young messenger from the governor's staff.

"Deliver it quickly," Wax said. "Pound on the door. Wake her up if you have to—and don't get scared off if she cusses at you or threatens to shoot you. She won't actually hurt you."

The young man nodded, though he'd gone pale.

"Tell her it's urgent," Wax said, holding up his finger. "Don't let her toss it aside and read it in the morning. You stay there until she's read what I wrote, you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good lad. Off with you."

The youth ran out. Wayne strolled over to Wax, passing the open door down to the saferoom. The bodies around it had been removed, though the blood remained.

"Ranette?" Wayne asked hopefully.

Wax nodded. "I thought of something that might help."

"I coulda delivered that, you know.…"

"You, she *would* shoot," Wax said.

"Only 'cuz she likes me," Wayne said, smiling. He'd have welcomed an excuse to go see Ranette. This night was getting darker and darker, it seemed.

“Wayne…” Wax said. “You know she doesn’t actually like you.”

“You always say that, but you’re just not seein’ the truth, Wax.”

“She tries to kill you.”

“To keep me alive,” Wayne said. “She knows I live a dangerous life. So, keepin’ me on my toes is the best way to make sure I stick around. Anyway, was that Marasi I saw in there with the governor and his important folk?”

Wax nodded. “She and MeLaan arrived a short time back. Aradel wants to declare martial law.”

“And you don’t?” Wayne asked, taking a seat on one of the nice couches that didn’t have much blood splattered on it. Important people were meeting nearby. He suspected he knew what would come next, and he intended to wait around for it.

Wax stood for a moment, then shook his head. “Bleeder set this all up, Wayne. She’s been pushing us toward this. ‘I rip out his tongue … I stab out his eyes…’”

“Now, I’m as for dismemberment as the next fellow,” Wayne said, “but that’s a mite violent for this time of day.”

“Bleeder wrote it on the wall down below. A poem of some sort. It doesn’t feel finished to me.”

“She nailed that priest through the eyes,” Wayne noted.

“And ripped out Winsting’s tongue,” Wax said. He fished in his pocket and brought something out, tossing it to Wayne.

“What’s this?” Wayne asked, turning it over in his fingers. It was a piece of painted wood.

“Remains of the Marksman’s mask. Bleeder was wearing it.”

“You think she was him all along?” Wayne asked.

“Maybe,” Wax said. “It would have served her purpose, riling up the people of the slums, reminding them how rich the houses are. By bringing him down, I put myself at odds with the common people.”

“I hate to say it, mate,” Wayne said, “but you ain’t exactly beloved of them anyway.”

“I’m a hero from the Roughs,” Wax said.

“You’re a conner,” Wayne said. “*And* a house lord, mate. Not to mention the fact that you can, yunno, *fly*. You can’t treat this like Weathering. You can’t convince a fellow you’re on his side by slapping him in jail overnight, then playing cards with him until he sees you as a regular chap.”

Wax sighed. “You’re right, of course.”

“Usually am.”

“Except that time on Lessie’s birthday.”

“You always have to bring that up, don’t you?” Wayne leaned back, tipping his hat down over his eyes. “Honest mistake.”

“You put dynamite in the *oven*, Wayne.”

“Gotta hide a gift where nobody’ll look for it.”

“I need to piece this together,” Wax said, starting to pace. “Sketch it out. Write it down. We’re missing something very important.”

Wayne nodded, but was hardly listening. Wax would figure it out. Wayne just needed to get some shuteye, while the getting was still good enough for …

He heard a door click open. He threw back his hat and was on his feet a second later, scrambling for the door. Wax cursed, pulling out one of his guns, following as Wayne dashed into the hallway and intercepted the servant with a plate full of little party foods.

“Aha!” Wayne said. “Thought you could slip by me, didja!”

The kitchen maid looked horrified as Wayne gathered up three of each of the treats. Wax stopped in the doorway, then lowered his gun. “Oh, for Harmony’s sake.”

“Harmony can get his own,” Wayne said, popping a little cake in his mouth. As he turned back to Wax, the maid scuttled away, heading for the meeting.

It was exactly what Wayne had been waiting for. Important folk meeting together always meant snacks. Or canapés, if you knew the code. Wayne popped one in his mouth—candied bacon wrapped around a walnut.

“How is it?” Wax asked.

“Tastes like cotton candy,” Wayne said, relishing the flavor, “made of baby.”

“I did not need to hear that,” Wax said, slipping his gun back into its holster. “I’m going to need to go back out there, see if I can figure out Bleeder’s plan. That leaves you here to protect the governor again.”

Wayne nodded. “I’ll do what I can, but that’s a tall order, mate.”

“I’ve arranged for some help,” Wax said, leading the way over to the ladies’ crapper. He knocked on the door.

“Still changing!” MeLaan’s voice came from inside.

“How long?” Wax said.

The door cracked, and a woman's face peeked out that looked completely unlike MeLaan's. "Not long," she said in MeLaan's voice. "This lady's hair was a real pain." She shut the door.

"I recognize that face," Wayne said, folding his arms and leaning against the wall.

"One of the guards," Wax said. "That got shot a little earlier."

"Oh right." Wayne had a sinking feeling. "Wasn't she one of the ones I tried to save?"

"Died shortly thereafter," Wax said. "MeLaan will keep the arm in a sling—that was where the shot hit first, before penetrating into the woman's lung. We'll keep her on the governor's guard staff, and hopefully Bleeder will be so busy looking for you and me that she'll miss MeLaan."

"I hope you appreciate this," the kandra's voice came from inside the crapper. "I *hate* being short. As a side note, this lady tasted awful. Far too lean and tough." The door cracked, revealing the face again. "Next time, choose a body that's been sitting around awhile, would you? Nice and aged is the best flavor for…"

She trailed off, looking from Wayne to Wax, noticing their expressions. "Oh right," she said. "Mortals. I'd forgotten how squeamish you can be."

"Please," Wax said, sounding pained, "show some respect for the dead woman. It's already difficult to let you use her corpse like this."

MeLaan rolled her eyes—rusts, it was strange to see her behave just like before, but in an entirely different body. "It's either me or the worms, kids. Don't you think she'd be happy to go out all at once, munched down in half an hour, rather than sitting there and melting into the ground over the course of—"

"Too much description, MeLaan," Wax said, his voice strained.

"Fine, fine. I'm almost ready; just have to get the clothing on. How is the hair?"

"Good," Wayne said. "I think you forgot an eyebrow though."

MeLaan felt at her face. "Hell," she said. "This is what you get by forcing me to work so quickly." She ducked back into the room.

"Speaking of quickly," Wax said through the door, "is this about what I can expect with Bleeder? A half hour to change bodies?"

Wayne nodded. That would be useful to know.

"No, unfortunately," MeLaan's voice said from inside, muffled. It was still the same voice as she'd had in her other body. Was she going to change that?

“Paalm is old-generation, *very* practiced. I don’t think anybody is as good as TenSoon, mind you, but Paalm will be fast—particularly swapping into a body she’s used before. I’ve known early-generationers who can change bodies in under ten minutes, and that’s going in blind.”

“Isn’t that tough?” Wayne called. “Like … I once hadda eat twenty sausages for a bet. Won five notes, but spent an hour on the ground moaning like a fellow on the pot tryin’ to force a mango through his delicate doughnut, if you catch my meaning.”

Wax groaned softly, but a short time later MeLaan opened the door again, and was this time clothed in a black suit like the other guards. She was also smiling. “You’re cute,” she noted to Wayne. “How’s my eyebrow?”

“Uh, good.” Cute? “But I’m taken.”

“In answer to your question,” MeLaan said, “it *is* hard, but not for the reason you’re implying. We can force-feed and expel excess, which makes doing the transformation near a drain like in here convenient. The tough part is memorizing the muscle patterns as you digest them. That and getting the hair right. You people are practically drowning in the stuff. Fortunately, for a quick change like this, I can ignore the hair under the clothing.”

“So … wait,” Wayne said, rubbing his chin. “You’re saying we might be able to check if a person is a kandra by…”

“… Seeing if they put leg and arm hair on?” MeLaan asked. “That might actually work, but only if the kandra had to change fast.”

“*Arm hair*,” Wayne said. “Right. I was thinkin’ of arm hair.”

“That is the most difficult part to get right on short notice,” MeLaan said. “We can’t make hair, so we’ve got to use your own, and place each strand in a pore. Arms and legs have thousands of the things. What a pain. Far worse than a mass on the head or whatnot.”

“MeLaan,” Wax said, digging in his coat pocket and bringing something out. “Do you recognize this?”

“I don’t have a lot to go on, chief, but I’d say it’s an empty glass vial.”

“Take it inside and turn off the lights,” Wax said, tossing her the vial as Wayne stepped forward, trying to get a look. That stuff seemed interesting.

MeLaan withdrew, then shoved open the door a second later. She grabbed Wax by the mistcoat, somehow still imposing despite the fact that she was now shorter than either of them. “Where did you get this?”

“Bottom of Bleeder’s robes,” Wax said. “The ones she was wearing to imitate a priest.”

“This is perchwither,” MeLaan said. “It’s a bioluminescent fungus. It grows in only one place.”

“Where?” Wax asked.

“The kandra Homeland.”

Wax looked deflated. “Oh. So that’s where we’d expect her to be going, right?”

“No,” MeLaan said. “The kandra are no longer trapped there. We move in society—we have homes, lives. If we want to meet up with others of our kind, we catch them at the pub. The Homeland is a monument. A holy site. A place of relics. The fact that she’s been there recently, wearing the body of someone she killed…” MeLaan shivered visibly, letting go of Wax. “It’s nauseating.”

“I should check it out,” Wax said. “She might be staying down there.”

MeLaan folded her arms, looking him over. “Harmony says it’s okay,” she said. “You can get in through the tombs; look for the sign of atium and use your other eyes. We don’t use that entrance very often, but it’s probably easiest for you. Just don’t break anything, lawman.”

“I’ll do my best,” Wax said, turning as a footman peeked in from the hallway, then approached with a small silver tray bearing a card.

“Lord Ladrian?” said the footman, holding out the tray. “Your coach has arrived.”

“Coach?” Wayne asked. On a hunt, Wax was usually in full-on “fly through the city like a rusting vulture” mode. Why would he need a coach?

Wax picked up the card on the tray, then nodded and took a deep breath. “Thank you.” He turned to Wayne and MeLaan. “Keep the governor alive. I’ll send word if I discover anything.”

“So what’s in the coach?” Wayne asked.

“I sent a note soon after I got here to the mansion,” Wax said. “There’s one person in this city who might have an inkling of what Bleeder is up to.” Wax’s face took on a grim cast.

Ah, of course, Wayne thought. He patted Wax on the shoulder. This wouldn’t be a pleasant meeting.

“Who?” MeLaan asked, looking from Wayne back to Wax. “What are you talking about?”

“Have you ever heard,” Wax said, “of a group called the Set?”

* * *

Wax found his uncle waiting comfortably inside the coach. No bodyguards. The coachman didn't even ask for Wax's weapons as he stopped at the door. Contacting his uncle had been easy; the appointment book had listed a few of Edwarn's safe-deposit boxes, kept under false names. After posting watch on one for a few weeks, Wax had found a letter inside, suggesting he try something else.

He'd left his own letter. After that, one had appeared for him. They never said anything useful, and Wax had driven himself crazy trying to find out how they were being placed. But Edwarn seemed to know the moment a new one from Wax arrived.

Wax took a deep breath, then climbed into the coach. Edwarn was a stocky man distinguished by a short, precisely trimmed beard, a beautifully tailored suit, and a cravat so narrow and thin, it lay flat like a bowtie loosened at the end of a long night. Edwarn's hands rested easily on the ornate head of a cane, and his face bore a wide smile.

"Nephew!" he said as Wax settled into his seat. "You can't imagine my joy upon receiving your note, and with a promise that you wouldn't try to arrest me. So quaint! I came immediately; I feel like we've been too distant lately."

"Distant? You tried to have me killed."

"And you've tried to return the favor!" Edwarn said, knocking with his cane on the roof to get the coach moving. "Yet here we sit, both alive and well. I see no reason why we can't be amiable. We are rivals, yes, but also still family."

"You're a criminal, Uncle," Wax said. "Considering the things you've done, I don't feel much familial empathy."

Edwarn sighed, slipping his pipe from his pocket. "Can't you at least try to be pleasant?"

"I'll try." Truth was, Wax wanted information from this man. Antagonizing him would not be smart.

They rolled on silently for a while as Edwarn lit the pipe, and Wax tried to organize his thoughts. How to approach this?

"Dangerous night," Edwarn noted, nodding out the window as they passed a group of men and women holding aloft lanterns and torches while listening to a woman standing on a stack of boxes. She shouted into the mists angry words that Wax couldn't quite make out. Rusts, that group was close to the governor's mansion. He hoped that Innate and the constables could get this under control.

"I wonder," Edwarn said, puffing on his pipe, "if that night long ago felt the same as this one—the night when the Survivor's Gambit played out. The fall of a regime. The start of a new world."

"You can't possibly think this is equivalent," Wax said. "The Lord Ruler's reign was one of terror and oppression. These people are upset, yes, but it's a far different world now."

"Different?" Edwarn said, letting smoke roll from his mouth as he spoke. "Perhaps. But human emotions are the same. It seems that no matter how nice the box is, put a man inside it and he will buck. Fight. *Rail*."

"And you claim to be on the side of the common man," Wax said dryly.

"Hardly. I want power. Wealth. Influence. Just like the people in the Survivor's crew, actually."

"They were heroes."

"And thieves."

"They were what they had to be."

"And Kelsier himself?" Edwarn said. "In the years before his grand gambit? What of the Ascendant Warrior, living on the street, scamming noblemen and priests for a living? Have you read the Words of Founding, Nephew? The Historica speaks frankly about their ambitions. The Survivor didn't just want to overthrow the Lord Ruler; he wanted to steal the empire's riches. He wanted to rule the world that came about upon the Lord Ruler's fall. He wanted power. Influence. Wealth."

"I'm not going down this road, Uncle," Wax said.

"Have you ever wondered," Edwarn mused, ignoring Wax's objection, "if you'd get along with them? If you'd lived back then, what would you have seen? A bunch of miscreants? Lawbreakers? Would you have trussed up the Ascendant Warrior and tossed her in a cell? The law is not something holy, son. It's just a reflection of the ideals of those lucky enough to be in charge."

"I don't know any constables," Wax said, "who think the law is perfect or the courts infallible. But they're the best damn things we have right now, and I'm not going to entertain for a *second* the idea that you're some kind of secret seeker of justice. You're as rotten as they come, Uncle."

"So pleasant," Edwarn said. "And this is what I get for responding to your invitation? Insults and vitriol. And one wonders why our house is considered a laughingstock these days. I’m told they invite you to parties just to see you strut.”

“I sent to you,” Wax said through clenched teeth, “because I think we might have a common enemy. I know you want to rule this city. Well, I need you to see reason. I’ve spoken with the creature. If we don’t stop her, there might not be a city *to* rule.”

Edwarn didn’t respond, holding his pipe and looking through the coach’s glass window at the curling mists in the darkness just outside.

“What do you know?” Wax asked, almost a plea. “I’m certain the Set has been watching events with interest. Your attempt to kill me earlier—tell me that was just a strike of opportunity. Tell me you aren’t working with her. She’ll see it all burn, Uncle. Help me bring her down.”

Edwarn mused silently awhile, enjoying his pipe. “Do you realize what your overzealous campaign against us has accomplished, Nephew?” he finally asked. “Half the city’s elements are too frightened to work with the Set, for fear that you’ll show up on their doorstep and shoot their mothers. The money you’ve seized hasn’t ruined us, but it has made some of our members very, very upset.”

“Good,” Wax said.

“You say that because you’re ignorant,” Edwarn spat. “Among the members of the Set, I am conservative. I speak against brashness, against violence. The more you shove, however, the weaker my influence becomes, and stronger grow the voices clamoring for change. At any cost.”

“Oh, Harmony,” Wax whispered. “You *are* working with her.”

“It’s more like we’re riding the storm,” Edwarn said. “Personally, I’d love to see you bring this creature down. It might topple some of my rivals, give me a chance to propose something audacious of my own to the Set. But I’m not going to help you, Nephew. Perhaps this is what needs to be.”

“How can you do this?” Wax asked. “You’re going to watch it all burn?”

“Ashes are excellent fertilizer,” Edwarn said.

“Unless they pile so high they smother everything.”

Edwarn drew his lips to a tight line. “You are shortsighted and self-righteous. You were ever so, even during your youth. But still I love you, Nephew. I consider it a sign of that love that I haven’t actually had you killed. I keep hoping you’ll see we are not your enemy. We are the thieves and miscreants of this day who will someday be hailed as heroes. The men and women who will change the world because … what was it you said?… this is what we need to be in order to survive.”

“And my sister?” Wax said. “Is holding her captive part of what you need to do to survive?”

“Yes, actually,” Edwarn said, meeting his eyes. “Because I don’t doubt that someday I’m going to need to use her against you. Kill me, and your sister is as good as dead, Waxillium.” He knocked again on the ceiling beneath the driver. The carriage slowed to a stop.

“Run along now,” Edwarn said. “Go be the toy soldier and pretend you wouldn’t have murdered the Survivor’s entire crew, if you’d lived under the Lord Ruler. Try to pretend you went out into the Roughs to find justice, and not because you realized life in this city was just too damn *hard* for you.”

They sat in the quiet, immobile coach. Wax held himself steady, though Edwarn’s eyes flicked toward Wax’s shoulder holster, as if he was expecting Wax to draw. He could. He could shoot this man right here and now—he’d broken promises before, and to far better men than his uncle.

Kill me, and your sister is as good as dead.…

Wax kicked the door open. “I’m going to go deal with this kandra, but know that I won’t forget you, Uncle. One day you’re going to find me standing behind you with a gun to your head, and you’ll have the sudden, horrible realization that there’s nothing left that can protect you.”

“I look forward to it!” Edwarn said. “If that day doesn’t come before next summer, you should join me for Mareweather dinner. We’ll have stuffed pig in your honor.”

Wax growled softly, but stepped from the coach and slammed the door.

18

Marasi had spent a great portion of her adult life preparing to be an attorney, and her mother had wished her to someday find her way to politics. Marasi had abandoned aspirations toward politics in her youth, and had recently abandoned the solicitors as well. The thing was, those professions had one important flaw: They were populated entirely with attorneys and politicians.

Despite her best efforts she now found herself in a room full of them. Governor Innate stood by the hearth here, in his private study, one arm resting on the mantel. Arrayed before him were the men and women of his executive staff, a hearty bunch who didn’t seem nearly as groggy as the constables and guards who had been called up in the middle of the night.

In fact, the group displayed a distinct energy as they discussed the crisis. Their words tumbled over one another in their eagerness to express their opinions, like children vying for parental approval. Marasi stood beside the window—where the governor had put her, saying he’d get to her later. So she waited, listened, and circumspectly took notes on her pad. If the kandra happened to be hiding among them, she doubted a verbal slip would enable her to recognize Bleeder, but it seemed the best use of her time as long as she was required to stay put.

“It will all blow over,” repeated the city sanitation director. He was an attorney who had been through the same program she’d completed, albeit many years ago. Marasi wasn’t sure why he needed a law degree to run city sanitation. “Rep, you’re taking this too seriously.”

“I am taking an attempt on my *life* too seriously?” Innate asked. “An attack that left one of my lifelong friends dead?”

That brought a stillness to the room, and the sanitation director settled back down, red-faced. Innate had changed his shirt from the one stained red with blood, but Marasi knew they all had seen him before he’d done so. She rather thought he’d delayed changing until they had.

“I wasn’t talking about the assassination attempt,” the sanitation director said. “I meant the ruckus outside. It will blow over.”

“They’re already looting,” the minister of trade noted, a bespectacled woman who had brought two aides to take notes for her. She hadn’t offered them seats.

“There will *always* be looting,” the sanitation director said. “It happens. We hunker down, let burn what needs to burn. Contain, rather than try to stamp out.”

“Foolishness,” said the secretary of education, a corpulent woman who sat with her feet up by the crackling fire. “This is a time for decisiveness, my lord governor. You need to show your rivals that you are not easily cowed. You know the Lekals have been getting traction lately, and your brother’s scandal will only fuel their ambition. Mark my words, they will present a strong candidate to rival you at the next election, and he will lean on this night’s events to discredit you.”

“Yes,” said the minister of public affairs. “Could they be behind the assassination attempt, perhaps?”

The governor glanced toward Marasi—the first time he’d acknowledged her since the meeting had begun. He knew about MeLaan now; she’d shown her true nature to him just before the meeting started. He believed, and had begun by explaining to the executive staff about the rogue kandra. The others obviously considered it foolishness and, after the way of their kind, were simply ignoring what he’d told them.

Marasi met his gaze calmly. Once upon a time she had dreamed of being a participant in meetings like this one. Gatherings where important decisions were made, where laws were drafted and political strategies adopted. Now, she found herself frustrated by all the talk. Waxillium was rubbing off on her, and perhaps not in ways she should appreciate.

"No, no," the sanitation director said. "The Lekals aren't behind this. An assassin? Are you mad, Donton? They would never be caught engaging in something so potentially damaging."

"Agreed," said the secretary of education. "This was someone far more desperate. I repeat, my lord governor. Decisiveness. Leadership. You asked about martial law? Well, that is the *minimum* you must do, I say. Send the constables out in force. Crush the looters, scatter the rioters, be seen protecting the city."

Others voiced their opinions on this, and the governor quieted them. "I'll consider. I'll *consider*." His tone was sharp, sharper than Marasi had heard from him before. "Out with you all. I need to think."

In that moment he looked haggard. The counselors quieted, then made their way out. Marasi moved to join them, reluctantly.

"Miss Colms," the governor said, walking to his desk, "a moment."

Marasi obeyed, stepping up before the desk as he settled down. He reached to the floor, pushing back the rug and exposing the top of a small safe, which he absently unlocked with a key from his desk. He reached inside, taking out his seal of office, then settled down to begin writing.

"Tell Constable-General Aradel that he has his writ of martial law," the governor said tiredly. "He's the only constable-general to contact me so far, which I find disturbing. I am appointing him with executive authority as lord high constable, director of all law-enforcement offices in the city until this crisis is over. The other octants' constables-general will need to report to him."

Marasi didn't reply. The others weren't going to like that. The rivalry among the octant precincts was officially characterized as friendly, but in reality had far too much bite to it for her taste. "And your instructions regarding the people of the city?" Marasi asked softly as he wrote. "Should the constables do as your education secretary suggests?"

Innate finished writing. He looked up at her, and seemed to weigh her with his eyes. "You're new to the constabulary, I believe? The … cousin of Lord Ladrian's betrothed?"

"I wasn't aware I'd attracted your attention," Marasi said.

"You haven't. *He* has. Damnable man."

Marasi remained silent, feeling awkward before his judgmental gaze.

"Those mobs will end up here sooner or later, you know," the governor said, tapping his pen on the table. "They'll come demanding answers. I must speak to them, turn this tide."

Speak to them? Marasi thought. *As you did earlier?* That speech hadn't shown any particular sense of empathy.

Rusts, had that only been this afternoon? Checking the governor's ornate desk clock, she found it was almost two—so the governor's speech had technically been yesterday. She probably shouldn't have looked at the time; seeing exactly how late it was merely reminded her of her own exhaustion. It was like an angry creditor pounding on her door; she'd be able to ignore it for only so long.

"Tell Aradel," the governor mused, "not to stop the people from converging here at the mansion, but he is to beat down any looters in other parts of the city. Put the fear of the sword into them. I'll need a force of constables here, of course, to keep the masses who come to me in check, but I do want to speak to them. This will be a night for *history* to be made."

"Sir," Marasi said. "I know a thing or two about the mentality of crowds, if you wish—"

Someone outside called for Innate, and he stood in the middle of Marasi's sentence. He shoved the writ toward her, sealed with his stamp, then marched out to deal with the questions.

Marasi watched him go with a sigh. Hopefully Wayne and that kandra woman would be able to assure his safety. She'd happily see Innate incarcerated someday, but she didn't wish him dead. His assassination would be, among other things, terrible for city morale.

She stored the writ beside her pistol in her purse, then walked from the room and slipped through the hallway, where many of the cabinet members were giving orders to aides and accepting cups of steaming black tea from household staff. Wayne lounged in a corner, feet up on an end table and spinning an expensive gold-and-mahogany pen between his fingers. Harmony knew where he'd stolen *that*.

Unfortunately, her motor needed a refueling, so she'd have to use more mundane methods to run the writ to Aradel. She found the footman and ordered a carriage.

The haggard footman, however, shook his head. "It will be a few minutes, miss, before I can dredge up a coach. The executive staff have half the cabs in the city running notes for them, and on a night like this one no less…" He glanced meaningfully toward the open door. Outside, the porch lights barely penetrated the mists. They curled and danced, almost timid. Tiny wisps would creep into the entry hall, then vanish almost immediately like steam over a stove.

"I will wait," Marasi said. "Thank you."

He seemed pleased by her response; perhaps others had been less understanding. As he was called away, Marasi idled in the doorway, staring into the mists. That orange haze over the city wasn't normal. Fires were burning out there. If they were lucky, those flames would only be massed lanterns and torches, not buildings.

Standing there strongly reminded her of something that she couldn't put her finger on. She shook her head and walked back into the mansion with half a mind to find Wayne and see what he thought of recent events. In the large sitting room beyond the entryway, she passed a weary serving man scrubbing the wooden floor. The bloodstains were stubborn, it appeared. The man had already discreetly rolled the rug up against the wall for disposal.

Marasi passed him and, changing her mind about finding Wayne, instead walked down the stairs toward the hidden chamber. *A city close to breaking,* she thought as she reached the bottom. *This has happened before.*

In the confined space, the air still smelled of the soap that had been used to clean up the blood. The empty saferoom had a quiet, scholastic feel about it, with all those books on the walls. There was no overhead lighting, just the lamps, shaded a soft red-orange. She walked around the room, noting the many volumes of the full Words of Founding when she passed it on the wall. The leather-bound books seemed pristine, and on a whim, she pulled the first one out and checked it. The pages were uncut, as sometimes happened in new books. This volume had obviously never been read.

Long ago the Survivor had pushed a city to the brink of destruction, then channeled that fury into a rebellion that had overthrown a millennium-long dictatorship. Every student learned of those days, but Marasi had read the detailed accounts, including of the night when it had all come to a head. She could imagine it had been a night very much like this one.

Only instead of the Survivor, this time it had been induced by a psychotic murderer.

She has to be doing it on purpose, Marasi thought, walking through the room. *Trying to echo that night when the Lord Ruler fell. A people on the* *brink of insurrection. Noble houses at each other's throats. And now …*

Now a speech. The governor would have his moment before the crowd, and they would sense the resonance even if they couldn't put their finger on it. They'd been taught about that night since childhood. They would listen to him, and expect him to be like the Last Emperor, who had spoken long ago on the night of the Lord Ruler's death. The Last Emperor had come to power because of his heartfelt words that night.

But Governor Innate was *not* Elend Venture. Far from it.

Marasi suddenly stopped and backed up a few steps. She'd been walking beside the built-in bookcases, paying little conscious attention to them, but just enough to have noticed something off. Here, on this long shelf of pristine books, were three in a row with spines scuffed at the bottom. What distinguished these books? They were part of a seven-volume collection of dry political treatises written long ago by the Counselor of Gods.

She took one and flipped through it, finding nothing of interest. Perhaps Innate had been studying lately. But … why were only the third, fourth, and fifth volumes scuffed? She picked up another and opened it—and here she found the reason. Cut into the center of the pages was a hole containing a key. Innate hadn't been reading Breeze's old essays. He had simply forgotten which volume had the key in it.

Marasi held up the key, then glanced at the room's solitary desk. Dared she?

Of course I dare, she thought, crossing the room with a swish of skirts. Her constable credentials, plus Aradel's concern about the governor, would give her legal grounds for doing a quick search. She knew the law as well as anyone.

She also knew that the law was subject to interpretation by the city's judges, most of whom had noble blood and would not take kindly to someone spying on the governor. That was why her fingers were trembling as she quickly tried the key in the desk drawer. It didn't fit. She paused, then tried a spot on the floor like the one up above, where the governor had gotten out his seal.

Sure enough, there was a hidden safe under the rug. She turned the key in it, and earned a satisfying *click*. She pulled the safe open and quickly scanned the contents.

A pistol.

Cigars. She didn't recognize the brand.

A bundle of banknotes tied with string. Enough to buy a house. Marasi's eyes bulged a little, but she kept searching.

A stack of letters. These she took over to the desk, expecting to find details of an illicit romantic relationship or the like. She skimmed them, then read more deeply, then sank down into the desk's chair, raising her fingers to her lips.

The letters did detail a relationship—or, rather, many of them. These were private communications with house leaders throughout the city. Although couched in euphemism and circumlocution, to her they clearly spoke of corruption.

Marasi grew cold as she flipped through them, letter by letter. The actual writing was opaque. *We agree that certain courtesies will be extended* or *These are acceptable terms as per our previous arrangement*. But they were dated, and her mind quickly related each of them to her notes back at the precinct. This was proof. She flipped through more. Yes, they aligned with her own statistical analysis. These were Innate's promises of political favors in exchange for bribes.

With the obfuscatory language, it might not be a smoking gun—but it was at least a very warm one. Better, Innate had added notations to most of the letters to remind himself of important points. Here was one probably trading a promise by Innate to push for higher tariffs on refined steel from outside the city in exchange for a favorable deal on a land purchase by one of his family. Another more recent one was about a judge's seat, when Innate had appointed a Hammondess scion to a recent opening.

She'd suspected corruption, but this was jarring—seeing it discussed like this in black and white. She sifted through the stack. No letters to the Lekals, his primary rivals. None to Waxillium either, Marasi saw with relief—nor any older ones to Edwarn Ladrian, Waxillium's uncle.

Under the letters was a ledger, which she expected would show what Innate thought he was still owed, and would also record the state of his private accounts. Flipping through quickly didn't tell her enough to be certain, but it did seem reasonable.

Marasi sat holding it all, feeling overwhelmed. *Rusts. The people are right to be in revolt.* Was this the crux of Bleeder's plan? Shove Innate into the limelight, then undermine him by exposing his corruption—indeed, the corrupt nature of virtually every noble family in the city? In revealing these letters, Marasi could be playing into the creature's hands. That made her sick. If he *was* this corrupt, didn't he need to be exposed and removed?

She hurriedly tucked the letters into her purse. Captain Aradel needed to see this. Marasi quickly shut and locked the safe, put back the key, and then started up the steps. She didn't want to be in the basement when the footman came looking for her to announce her carriage.

Innate will claim they were planted by Bleeder, Marasi thought as she reached ground level. *He'll have an easy out.* Beyond that, if he noticed they were gone, he'd have a pretty good idea of who took them. That same servant was still cleaning up, and he'd seen Marasi go down and return.

But Rust and Ruin, she wasn't going to just ignore something like this.

* * *

Flying through the air at night let Wax see the distinct presence of humankind, as marked by strict boundaries. Where they dwelled, there was illumination. Pinpricks in the darkness, men and women staking a claim on the night. The lights spread like the roots of a tree.

His uncle had left him far from where he wanted to be. Fortunately, for a Coinshot even the vastness of Elendel was manageable. He didn't immediately turn inward, however, to visit the kandra Homeland. His uncle's words haunted him, and before those Bleeder's gibes. They attacked from two different directions, like pins pushed into either temple.

He needed to think, to be alone. Perhaps then he could sort through what this mess meant. He landed on a rooftop overlooking the vast glowing carpet of lights before him. A cat watched him from a nearby flower box, its eyes alight. Below was another row of pubs. Loud, raucous. Surely it was past two in the morning, yet they showed no signs of quieting down.

Rusts, how he hated that one could never feel truly alone in the city. Even in the privacy of his mansion, the quiet was marred by the incessant passage of carriages outside.

He leaped away into the night, frightening the cat. He soared high in a long arc, trying to get far enough away that he couldn't hear the men shouting drunkenly in the row of pubs. His search took him eastward, toward the edge of the city. As he approached, something emerged from the mists like the bleached spine of some ancient monster. Eastbridge, a massive construction that spanned the Irongate River here.

On one hand, he marveled that humankind could create something like this—an enormous riveted marvel, big enough to let motors pass and also hold railroad tracks. On the other hand, the mists completely engulfed the bridge, giving it an even more skeletal cast. Humankind would create, and take pride in those creations, but Harmony's presence could make it all seem trivial.

Did He know? Wax landed atop one of the bridge's towers, boots clanging. *Could He have saved Lessie?*

The answer was simple. Of course Harmony had known. To believe in a God was to accept that He or She wasn't going to deliver you from every problem. It wasn't something Wax had ever dwelled on. Living in the Roughs, he'd accepted that sometimes you just had to weather things on your own. Help didn't always come. That was life. You dealt with it.

But now, something felt different. He'd spoken to Harmony. Hell, Wax was out here right now because of a request from God Himself. That made it all the more personal. God hadn't saved Lessie, hadn't given Wax warning. And now He expected Wax to just hop to it and do as He demanded?

And what would you do? Wax addressed himself, walking along the bridge's lofty pinnacle. *Let the city burn? Let Bleeder keep killing?*

Of course he couldn't. Harmony knew that too. He had Wax by the throat.

Are you there? Wax asked, sending the thought out. *Harmony?*

He felt at his ear before remembering that he'd taken out his earring. By necessity, yes, but in that moment he was glad not to have it. Not to let God get a purchase on his mind, for the thoughts he had weren't particularly pious.

Wax strode through the mists, while down below a lone motorcar puttered across the bridge. Bleeder was toying with him. He could feel her fingers sneaking in, piercing his skull, wrapping around his mind. He could see exactly what she was doing, yet couldn't banish the questions she raised.

Wax paused at one end of the tower's top. From here he could see the edge of the city, where the lights gave way to the darkness of the countryside. Behind him, the city was a brilliant blaze, thousands upon thousands of lights, but the electric lines hadn't yet come out past the bridge. On the outskirts of Elendel, the lights stopped. The last few hung on the bridge, like lighthouses looking out at the vast blackness of the sea.

He yearned for that darkness. To leap out into it, escape all this responsibility—stop needing to worry about hundreds of thousands of people he couldn’t know, and get back to helping the few he could.

Freedom. Freedom, to Wax, wasn’t the absence of responsibility. He didn’t doubt that if he left again, he’d find himself as a lawman once more. No, freedom was not lack of responsibilities—it was being able to do what was right, without having to worry if it was also wrong.

He didn’t contemplate leaving, not seriously. But he did sit for a time, looking out at that darkness. Trying to look past the people, the shadowed suburbs, and see simplicity again. Rusts. What he wouldn’t give to trade all the politicians, games, and secrets for an honest murderer calling him out on the street.

Coward.

His own thought. Not from Harmony, or Bleeder. That made it all the more like a punch to the gut, for he knew it to be the truth. Wax took a deep breath and stood up again, shouldering his burdens. He turned away from the darkness and leaped off the bridge, Pushing himself into the night again. He’d come here for a moment’s solace, to think.

Turned out, he didn’t like where those thoughts were taking him.

19

As much as Wayne appreciated all the fancy treats the governor was providing, he had to admit he wasn’t entirely sympathetic to the man’s plight. After all, the whole point of having someone in charge—like the governor—was about makin’ sure people knew which fellow to kill.

That was why they had elections, wasn’t it? Innate got to be in charge and order everybody about, but when the assassins got bored, they didn’t go whack the guy what sold fish on the street corner. They went for the guy in charge. You had to take the good with the bad, you did. On one hand, you got fancy sweets any time of day. On the other hand, you might find murderers in your loo. That was the breaks.

And this Innate guy, he seemed to really *want* to meet Ironeyes. Not running away to the country when you *knew* a psychopathic, shapeshifting super-Allomancer was after you? Yeah, he understood he was a target. As Wayne sauntered after him—taking the tray from the serving girl as she tried to retreat with the uneaten cakes—the governor stopped in the doorway to his study.

“I need a few minutes to think, to prepare my remarks,” he said to Wayne and the other guards. “Thank you.”

“But sir!” MeLaan said. “You can’t go in alone. We need to protect you!”

“And what are any of you going to do,” Innate said, “about someone who can move at the speed of a thunderclap? We will just have to take our chances that the constables can deal with this … creature.”

“I don’t think—” MeLaan began, but cut off as he shut the door, leaving her, Wayne, and a couple of other guards in the hallway.

Wayne rolled his eyes, then leaned against the wall. “You two,” he said to the other guards, “go watch the window from outside that room, whydontcha? We’ll set up here.”

The two fellows shuffled, looked like they’d object, but then slunk out of the hallway. *I wonder,* Wayne thought, settling down on the floor beside the door, *if they’re rethinkin’ their career choices. What with most everyone else guarding the governor dead already …*

“You mortals,” MeLaan said, waving toward the door, “can be surprisingly cavalier with your limited life spans.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said. “He probably just wants to get me in trouble.”

“What?” MeLaan sounded amused. “By getting himself killed?”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “The idiot forbade me from goin’ to his fancy party earlier, then ditched me afterwise. He’s got it in for me. He’s gonna get himself killed, and leave me to explain it to Wax. ‘Sorry, mate. I let your pet politician get ripped in half.’ And Wax’ll scowl at me real good, even though ’s not my fault.”

MeLaan sat down across from him and grinned. “Is that what happened to his horse?”

“Why you gotta bring that up again?” Wayne asked, wriggling down to get comfortable and tipping his hat over his eyes. “That *really* wasn’t my fault. I had myself a dehabilitating injury when that happened.”

“De…”

“Yeah,” Wayne said, “made me cuss and drink like a bugger.” He settled back, listening, eyes closed. Servants moved through the building. Messengers went over their routes. Important types discussed their opinions just a room over.

They all talked. Everyone had to talk. People couldn’t just think something, they had to *explain* it. Wayne was the same. He was people, after all.

This murderer, this kandra, she was people too. She had talked to Wax. She *had* to talk.

Wax would probably catch her. He did things like that, impossible things that nobody thought he could. But just in case he didn't, Wayne listened. You could tell a lot about people from the way they talked. You saw their past, their upbringing, their aspirations—all in the words they used. And this kandra … sooner or later she'd slip up and use the wrong word. A word that would be obvious, like a fellow drinking milk in the middle of a rowdy tavern.

He didn't hear anything right off, though oddly he *did* notice MeLaan whispering to herself. As he listened, she modulated her voice, making it deeper—though still feminine. She repeated a few words to herself.

"She woulda been a twofie," Wayne noted, eyes still closed.

"Hm?" MeLaan said.

"Your bones," Wayne said. "Woman you're wearin' right now. Twofie. Second Octant. Raised on the outskirts."

"And how do you know that?" MeLaan asked.

"Heard her curse as I was helpin' her," Wayne said, feeling a stab of regret. The woman had just been doing her job, trying to keep someone from being killed.

She's still doing her job though, he thought, cracking an eye and looking at MeLaan. *Her bones are, at least.* Given the choice, if he died while trying to do something important, he'd rather that his bones get up and see it done right. Hell, with some kandra friends, he could be annoying Steris well into the afterlife.

"Like this?" MeLaan said. "Second Octant, touch of agave farmer?"

"Nice," Wayne said. "Draw out the end of your sentences, pitch them lower. Get some real twofie into that voice."

"Is this better?"

"Yeah, actually," Wayne said, sitting up. "That's damn good."

"TenSoon would be proud," MeLaan said. "I can still get a difficult accent right, when I need to."

"Difficult?" Wayne said. "The twofie accent?"

"With agave farmer."

"Common mix," Wayne said. "Once, I hadda do a guy who grew up on the northwestern coast, raised by deaf parents, only talking once in a while—

who had then moved in with the Terris fundamentalists up in the mountains there."

MeLaan frowned as a servant bustled past carrying linen. Some of the executive staff were going to be staying through the night, what was left of it, and guest rooms needed to be prepared. "I don't know if I can do that," MeLaan said, talking in a slow, deliberate way, with a hint of Terris and a lot of slurred words. "But it does sound like fun."

"Ha!" Wayne said, turning on the accent, which was actually more clipped than MeLaan had made it. "Good, but you're trying too hard. Being raised by parents who can't hear doesn't make a chap stupid. He just looks at the world differently, see?"

"Not bad," MeLaan said. The next servant who passed gave them a glare as she had to pick her way over their outstretched legs in the hallway.

"It's better if I have a hat," Wayne said.

"A … hat."

"Sure," Wayne said. "Hats is a disguise for your *brain*. Helps you think like the person what wore it last. You wanna know a guy? Put on his hat."

"Has anyone ever told you that you're surprisingly wise?" MeLaan asked.

"All the bloody time."

"They're idiots. You're not wise, you're playing them. You're doing this on purpose." She grinned. "I love it."

Wayne tipped his hat forward, smiling and leaning back again. "I'm not lying 'bout the hats though. They do help."

"Sure," MeLaan said. "Like bones."

He cracked an eye at her. "Does it ever … bother you? Knowin' you might live forever?"

"Bother me? Why would it? Immortality is damn convenient."

"Don't know about that," Wayne said. "Seems to me that it would be nice to finally be *done*, you know? It's like … like you're running a race, and you don't know quite where the end is, but you got an idea. An' you only need to make it that far. I can do that, I figure. But you, you don't have no end."

"You actually sound like you *want* to die."

"Someday," Wayne said. "Huh. Maybe I should get into politics."

MeLaan shook her head at him, seeming bemused. "It can be daunting," she admitted a short time later, "to consider eternity, as Harmony must see it. But anytime I get bored, I can just live a new life."

"Put on a new hat," Wayne said. "Become someone else."

“Switch it up. Be bold where once I was timid. Be crass where I was respectful. Makes life interesting, dynamic.” She paused. “And there’s something else. We *can* die, if we want.”

“What, just like that?”

“Kinda,” MeLaan said. “Don’t know if you’ve read the accounts. They’re blurry about this topic anyway, but near the end of the World of Ash, Ruin tried to take over the kandra. Control them directly. Well, TenSoon and those in charge, they were *really* terrified by that. So they planned, and we all talked. And about a century after the Catacendre, we figured out a way to stop our own lives. Takes a little concentration, but sets the body into a spiral where we just … end.”

“Nice,” Wayne said, nodding. “That makes a lot of sense. Always have an escape route planned. Oh, and your ‘a’s are still off; you carried them over from your own accent. They aren’t nasal enough. Draw them out, if you wanna sound like a real twofie.”

She cocked her head at him. “You’re wasted as a human.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I’ve barely had a few mouthfuls today.” He reached in his pocket and checked his flask. “Well, maybe a wee more than that.”

“No, I meant—”

He grinned at her, and she cut off, then grinned back. He tipped his hat to her, then closed his eyes and continued listening. A short time later, she stood up and started pacing the hall, and he could hear her saying her “a” sounds to herself as she walked.

He listened for a good long while, catching nothing abnormal, though he was pretty sure the sanitation-minister guy was lying about his education. That fellow had never been to the university—or if he had, he hadn’t hung around long enough to pick up the proper words. Wayne was mulling this over when he heard something out front. A voice, faint but unmistakable.

He scrambled to his feet, causing MeLaan to jump.

“Gottago,” he said. “Watchdaidiot.”

“But—”

“Berideback,” Wayne said, clutching his hat and running down the hallway, his long Roughs-style duster flaring to the sides. He raced around the corner and dashed toward the front of the mansion.

“He said to deliver it here,” the woman was saying to the butler. “So I’ve brought it. It was a simple task—he just needed something made. Hardly worth waking me…”

She turned to him. A radiant, glorious woman, built like a good Roughs fence—just tall enough, lean, but strong too. She had dark hair, which he'd compared to a pony's on several occasions—and it was right unfair that she should get mad, considering she kept it in a tail and everything. She wore trousers, because skirts were stupid, and boots, 'cuz stuff needed to be kicked.

The whole world could be going wrong, but seeing her made him forget. He grinned.

In return she gave him her special scowl, the one just for him. It was how he knew she cared. That, and when she shot him she tended to aim for places that didn't hurt too much.

"She's with me," Wayne said, running up.

"Like *hell* I am," Ranette said, but she let him steer her away from the butler.

"And one wonders," the butler said from behind, "how His Grace's life can be threatened, when we're letting every dust rat in the city saunter up and—"

He cut off as Ranette spun, her pistol out. Wayne caught her arm in time to stop her from firing.

"Dust rat?" she muttered.

"When's the last time you bathed?" Wayne said. Then winced. "Just … you know, curious."

"Guns don't care if I stink, Wayne. I have things to do. And I *don't* like being ordered around." She shook a little cloth pouch in her left hand. Behind, the butler had grown very pale.

Wayne got her into the sitting room. She didn't stink, despite what she said—she smelled of grease and gunpowder. Good scents. Ranette scents.

"What is it?" Wayne asked, snatching the pouch once they were out of sight.

"Something Wax asked me to make," Ranette said. "Who got killed over there?" She pointed toward the still-open secret door down to the saferoom. Murder always caught her attention, if only because she'd want to see the bodies and judge how well the bullets tore up the flesh.

Wayne rolled a small metal object from the pouch onto his palm.

A bullet.

His hand started to shake.

“Oh, for Harmony’s sake,” Ranette said, plucking the bullet from his hand before he could drop it. “It’s not a gun, you idiot.”

“It’s a part of one,” Wayne said, shoving his hand in his pocket and breathing deeply. He could hold a bullet. He did that all the time, for Wax. The shaking subsided. Something seemed odd about that bullet though.

“So if I gave you a splinter of wood, and told you it had once been in a rifle stock, you’d go to pieces then too?”

“Dunno,” Wayne said. “You think I understand how my brain works?”

“I’d say there’s a logical fallacy in that statement,” Ranette said. “Maybe two.” She tucked the bullet back into the pouch. “Wax here?”

“No. He’s off detectiving.”

“Then you’ll have to take this,” she said, handing him the pouch. “His note insisted it was important. Half powder as he asked, piercing bullet, forged not to shatter.”

He *could* hold a bullet. He took it, then tucked it away immediately in his duster. See?

“So, uh, want to go get a drink?” he said. “You know, when the city is safe. Or maybe before it’s safe? I don’t mind none if the pub’s a little on fire while we drink.”

“You know I’d sooner shoot myself, Wayne,” she said with a sigh. “And Misra would shoot me if—by chance—I did go, come to think of it.”

Wayne frowned. That was nowhere *near* the vitriol he normally got from her. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

She shook her head, glancing back toward the entryway. “It’s bad out there, Wayne. People still on the streets, thronging together, shouting. I’ve seen crowds like this before, in the Roughs. Usually right before a man got strung up, law or no law. Those were towns of five hundred. What happens when it’s *five million* who start acting like that…”

“Probably the return of the Ashen World,” Wayne said. “What better time to finally profess your long-requited love for a certain handsome fellow what don’t mind none if you smell like the inside of a barrel of sulfur?”

She gave him the glare again. He grinned. But then she didn’t shoot him. Or even punch him. Damn. This was *bad*.

“They’re starting to gather outside,” Ranette said, distracted. “Chanting slogans about the governor.”

“I need to check that,” Wayne decided. If the governor wasn’t going to let him in and watch him close up, maybe he could learn something about

Bleeder’s plans out in that crowd. “Get back to your house, lock the doors, and keep your guns handy.”

It was telling that she didn’t offer the slightest objection to his order as he strode toward the door out into the mists.

* * *

Captain Aradel regarded the governor’s writ as he would the last will and testament of a beloved family member: with both reverence and obvious discomfort.

“He names me lord high constable,” Aradel said. “But … rusts, I’m no lord.” He looked up at Reddi and his other lieutenants.

“Perhaps,” Reddi said, “the appointment conveys a title, sir.”

“The governor can’t just appoint someone to the peerage,” Marasi said. “A new title has to be ratified by a council with a quorum of the major house seats in the city.” She bit her lip as soon as she said it. She didn’t mean to be contrary.

Aradel didn’t appear to mind. He carefully folded the writ and slid it into his jacket pocket. She’d found him gathering a sizable force outside of headquarters, preparing to still malcontents and ring constabulary bells to let the people living nearby know that at least someone was patrolling this night. Phantom sounds floated through the mists. Distant shouts. Clangs. Screams. It felt like hell itself surrounded them, shrouded in a veil of darkness and fog.

“Sir,” Marasi said. “The governor said that he wanted you to do two things. First, send a detachment to forcefully quell rioting in the city. Second, bring up a smaller force to guard him as he prepares to address the people near the mansion. You’re not to turn protesters away there, but elsewhere in the city … sir, he counseled you to be firm of hand. Very firm.”

“Rusting idiots deserve it,” said Lieutenant Mereline, a woman with short blonde hair.

“No need for bloodthirst, Lieutenant,” Aradel said. “I seem to remember you cussing out the Hasting family with some regularity yourself.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m setting fire to the city,” Mereline said. “The high houses being bastards doesn’t excuse being bastards ourselves. Sir.”

“Well, the mansion seems a good enough center from which to operate,” Aradel said. “Chip, you and the messengers run to the other constables-general and ask them to meet me at the governor’s mansion with their officers. We’ll coordinate the city lockdown from there. Everyone else, let’s double-time it that way. If His Grace wants to talk to the people, I want a nice *thick* barrier of police bodies between him and his constituents, understand?”

The group bustled into motion, the bell ringers setting out in front, the messengers scattering—one even taking to the skies; Chip was one of the Coinshots. The rest of the constables fell into a march. An uneven one—they weren’t soldiers—but no less resolute.

“Sir,” Marasi said, walking quickly up to Aradel, “there’s something else I need to tell you, if you can spare a moment.”

“How important is it?” Aradel asked, pausing at the side of the group.

“Very.”

Reddi cleared his throat behind them. “Perhaps you should discuss it while traveling to the mansion, sir. If the governor really is planning to address the crowds…”

“Yes,” Aradel said. “Innate suddenly appointed me lord high constable; that immediately worries me about what other kinds of impulsive things he’s capable of doing tonight. Let’s do this on the move, Colms. Reddi, bring along the rest of the constables as smartly as you can. I’m going to the mansion ahead of you.”

Marasi nodded. The things she wanted to discuss would be best said in the privacy of a carriage anyway.

Except …

Idiot, she thought as Aradel jogged over to a group of horses in constable livery, reins held by a corporal. The carriage she’d been contemplating pulled away, loaded with equipment most likely. Reddi grinned at her smugly.

Marasi sighed. She’d been looking forward to maintaining her decorum tonight. Ah well. She walked over and took a set of reins.

Aradel was already in his saddle. He glanced at her, then raised a hand to his head. “Oh, of course. I didn’t think—”

Marasi swung up into the saddle, awkwardly bunching her skirt up between her legs and sitting on part of it, revealing a generous expanse of leg. “It occurs to me, sir,” Marasi noted, “that lady constable uniforms could be distinctly more utilitarian.”

“We’ll … make a note of it, Lieutenant Colms.” He glanced toward the retreating carriage. “If you wish—”

“Sir,” Marasi said, “I believe the city is on *fire*. Perhaps we can discuss feminine modesty on another occasion?”

“Of course.” He nodded and they set off in a clatter of hooves, trailed by two corporals with rifles in the scabbards on their saddles. The four horses quickly outpaced the larger group of constables, and even the carriage, as they rode through the mists.

Marasi was glad of the darkness, as it hid her furious blush. In compensation, she had gained the memory of Reddi’s stunned expression, utterly shocked by what she’d done.

Well, why *shouldn’t* she show her legs? Historical precedent, and simple practicality, demanded that women be allowed into all professions. What lord would turn away a Thug or a Bloodmaker from his guards just because she had breasts? What constable office would pass up the chance to have every Tineye or Coinshot they could get? What bank wouldn’t jump at the chance to employ a Terriswoman with copperminds?

The thing was, woman constables were *also* expected to be models of ladylike behavior. A holdover from the old days, reinforced by the speeches of Lady Allrianne Ladrian soon after the Catacendre. There was just this blunt expectation that you would strive to remain feminine at the same time as you did your job. A heavy double standard to bear. At times Marasi didn’t mind. She *liked* dresses, and nice hair, and solving problems with a careful word instead of a fist to the face. To her it was perfectly reasonable to be feminine and a constable. But did the men ever have to worry about being properly masculine while doing their jobs?

One social problem at a time, Marasi, she admonished herself, riding alongside Aradel. Though she *was* going to buy some rusting trousers. Riding this way was *cold*.

“You ride well,” Aradel called to her as they slowed slightly from their initial burst away from the others. He led the way across a canal bridge, cutting across the middle of the Third Octant to get to the Second.

“I’ve had plenty of practice,” Marasi said.

“That’s uncommon in the city these days,” Aradel noted. “A hobby?”

“You could say that,” Marasi said, blushing as she remembered her girlish fascination with the Roughs, lawmen, and Allomancer Jak stories. When her friends—well, acquaintances—had been given new coats for their birthdays, she’d begged for a Roughs duster and hat.

Pure foolishness, of course. She’d completely grown out of that.

“What is it you wanted to tell me?” Aradel called.

“Could we slow further for a moment?”

He nodded and obliged, to the point where the horses were maintaining a brisk walk. Marasi opened the purse she’d slung over her shoulder and thrust the letters at Aradel. She hadn’t consciously realized how eager she’d been to pass them on to someone else, so that the responsibility they represented wouldn’t rest solely on her.

Aradel took them. “What’s this?” he asked quietly.

“You remember telling me to snoop around the governor’s place, if I got the chance?”

“I remember telling you—with great circumspection—to keep your eyes open, Lieutenant.”

“I did, sir. I kept my hands open too. In case something damning *happened* to fall into them.”

“Harmony. What did you find?”

“Letters,” Marasi said, “from Innate to various ladies and lords in the city, arranging for the purchase of political favors and the suppression of legislation they didn’t want. Sir, they’re annotated in his own hand, and they match my records of suspicious events during his tenure as governor. During the ride to bring you the writ I read through them, and I’m convinced he’s just as corrupt as his brother was.”

Aradel gave no outward reaction of either surprise or outrage. He rode in silence, gripping the letters, eyes forward.

“Sir?” Marasi finally asked.

“You put me in a difficult position, Lieutenant.”

“Sir. I’d say that the governor has put you in that position, not me.”

“How legally did you obtain these?”

“That depends,” Marasi said, “on how the courts would interpret your authority to investigate when there is reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, and whether or not you were justified in authorizing me to act.”

“In other words, you stole them.”

“Yes, sir.”

Aradel tucked them away.

“It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t protect him, sir,” Marasi offered. “Until proven guilty in court, he’s still the rightful leader of the city. This isn’t the Roughs, where we can just stride up and shoot someone, then publish our reasons later.”

“The mere fact that you feel you need to point that out,” Aradel said, “means you’ve been spending too much time with your Coinshot friend, Colms. I’m not considering avoiding my duty. I’m just thinking of all those people, and their rioting. And they’re *right*. They *are* being robbed by the system. Ruin … we were supposed to be better than this. What if the Lord Mistborn saw us now?”

“I suspect,” Marasi said, “he’d tell us to do something about the situation.”

Aradel nodded curtly. When he offered no further commentary, Marasi kicked her horse back into a trot, and the lord high constable followed suit.

* * *

Tradition held that today’s Field of Rebirth looked exactly the same as on that day long ago when humankind had crept from the wombs of stone that Harmony had created. Though the city had claimed all of the surrounding area, this central ring of pleasant grass and gentle hills had been left as a monument to another time.

Marewill flowers brushed Wax’s mistcoat as he strode across the springy ground. The tradition that this place hadn’t changed was pure stupidity. Surely when Breeze and Hammond had climbed out into the sunlight, they hadn’t found grass that was perfectly manicured or flowers that grew in careful lines. Did people who spoke of that tradition just ignore the benches and the pathways? The buildings? Surely Harmony hadn’t left *lavatories* on the grassland for the convenience of visitors.

At the center the highest hill was topped by the half museum, half mausoleum sheltering the tombs of the Last Emperor and the Ascendant Warrior. Their giant statues rose above, dominating the area. As Wax approached, he was surprised to find lamps on the low structure spilling light across the grass and flowers. A pair of constables guarded the door.

“Now, just turn on back and don’t make trouble,” one of them called as Wax approached.

Wax ignored the order, striding out of the mists and up to the men. “The caretakers called for your help, I assume?”

The two constables studied him, then reluctantly saluted. His reputation preceded him, though these men wore the patches of constables from the First Octant. It was a precinct he hadn’t often visited, but who else strode through the night in a mistcoat with a shotgun strapped to his leg?

“They’re worried about looters,” one of the constables said, a squat fellow with a half beard around his mouth. “Um, sir.”

“Wise,” Wax said, striding past them and pushing into the mausoleum.

“Uh, sir?” one of the constables said. “They said not to let … Sir?”

Wax pushed the door shut as the two constables started arguing outside about whether they should stop him or not. He scanned the open foyer, with its murals of the Originators. Hammond, the Lord Mistborn, Lady Truth, Wax’s own ancestor Edgard Ladrian. Portly and self-satisfied, in his portrait he held a cup of wine. He’d always looked like the sort of person Wax would want to punch on sight. The type who was certainly guilty of *something*.

Wax ignored the displays of various relics from the World of Ash, and didn’t enter the chamber that held the resting places of the Ascendant Warrior and her husband, though he did raise his gun and spin the cylinder toward them in acknowledgment. A Roughs tradition to respect the fallen.

“What’s this?” A bleary-eyed woman stepped out of a nearby room, apparently a small apartment for the caretaker. “Nobody was to be let in!”

“Routine inspection,” Wax said, striding past without looking.

“Routine? In the middle of the night?”

“You asked for constable involvement,” Wax said. “Codes require that when you ask for guards from the precinct, we have to do an inspection to make sure you don’t have contraband.”

“Contraband?” the woman asked. “This is the *Originator Tomb*!”

“Just doing my job,” Wax said. “You can take it up with my superiors outside, if you wish.”

She stormed out toward the front doors in a huff as Wax reached a small room unadorned with relics or plaques. The only thing in here was a hole in the ground.

It was a gaping pit fenced by a railing to keep inquisitive children from tumbling in. There was a ladder, but Wax dropped a bullet casing and jumped, falling freely a short distance before slowing himself and hitting the dark, glassy stone floor at the bottom.

A few lights dangled from the ceiling, like drips of molasses. He Pushed on a nearby light switch, causing the lights to flicker on throughout this enormous cavern. He’d visited here as a youth; every tutor brought their charges to visit, and he understood it was common in the public schools as well. It felt different now, standing alone in the large, low-ceilinged chamber. No jabbering tourists to break the mood or chase away visions of the past. He could hear much better the water rushing in the distance, where the river flowed. Parts of the caverns were supposed to have flooded over time. He could only vaguely remember explanations during his tour here of why others remained dry.

He walked into the cavern, trying to imagine what it had been like to huddle in one of these caves, the world dying outside, wondering if you were going to spend the rest of your short life trapped in darkness. He trailed his fingers on the stone walls as he wound around corners. The place was large and open, but also contained a series of smaller, bulbous chambers at the side. Most were part of the museum, and contained plaques with quotes from the Originators, written in metal. Others contained depictions of the rebuilding of the world, or other relics such as a replica of both Harmony's Bands and the Bands of Mourning.

One entire chamber was dedicated to the Words of Founding, Harmony's books, lore, knowledge, and own holy account of what had happened to the World of Ash. Another chamber contained volumes by other Originators, some of which were considered holy canon by one sect or another—while some, like the Docksithium, were decidedly apocryphal. Wax had tried to read the thing once. Copyright pages were more interesting.

He lingered at a chamber dedicated to the Survivor containing a hundred different depictions of him by various artists, some contemporary, others ancient. There was fervent fascination with his posthumous "apparitions" to people during the final days, though Harmony himself attributed those to the Faceless Immortals.

Echoing voices chased Wax onward. Wayne would probably give him hell for confusing the poor people, rather than just telling them what he was doing. Of course, Wayne would probably have convinced them he was the Lord Ruler, then made them fix him dinner. So he tried not to let Wayne's moral compass influence him too much.

Wax counted down the chambers dedicated to each of the metals until he reached the sign of atium. This little chamber contained documentation and rumors about the mythological metal; Wax didn't have the time to read them. Instead, he followed the blue lines his steelsight showed him. They pointed toward a side wall, where he was able to pry back a decorative piece of wood paneling and push on a lever, popping open a doorway and revealing a cavern beyond.

He slipped in, unhooked an old oil lantern from the wall, and pulled the door shut before kneeling down in the pitch blackness, fishing in his gunbelt for some matches. As he pulled them out, a growling voice sounded in the dimness.

"I've been waiting for you."

20

Wax held very still in the darkness. He flared his steel, seeking guidance from that comfortable fire inside of him. The blue lines pointed exclusively behind him; those pointed toward the hidden doorway and the nails in the wall. There was nothing else.

Except … Could he just barely make something out? Two faint lines, tiny as the threads of a spiderweb. He flared his metal, straining, Pushing. The lines quivered in the darkness. Then they were gone.

Wax whipped out his Sterrion and pointed it down the corridor away from the lines, and fired three times in quick succession. The flash of gunpowder lit the room like lightning as he leveled his other gun toward the blue lines and the source of the sound.

In those flashes, he made out something in the darkness crouching nearby. It was inhuman, with bestial eyes and stark white teeth. *Rust and Ruin.* Fingers sweaty on his gun, Wax backed away from the thing, ready to fire.

He didn’t pull the trigger. You didn’t shoot something for talking to you.

“You’re certainly a jumpy one,” the voice growled.

“Who are you?” *What are you?*

“Light your lantern, human,” the voice said. “And lock that door. Let’s be away from here before someone comes to investigate the gunfire.”

Wax paused to catch his breath and steady his nerves, but eventually slipped his guns back into their holsters. Whatever it was, it could have attacked him instead of speaking to him. It didn’t want him dead.

He lit the small lantern, but when he raised it, the creature had retreated into the corridor until it was just a shadow. Still unnerved, Wax flipped the latches he found on the wall, locking the hidden doorway closed from the inside.

“Come,” the voice said.

“You’re one of them,” Wax whispered, raising the lantern and following the shadowy figure, which walked on all fours. “You’re a kandra.”

“Yes.”

Wax jogged to catch up, his lanternlight finally giving him a good look at his companion. A wolfhound, easily the largest he had ever seen, of a mottled grey coloring. The pelt reminded him of the mists.

“I’ve read about you,” Wax said.

“Thrilling,” the kandra growled. “I’m so happy Sazed included me in his little book so that drunk people can curse by my name.”

“They … do that?”

“Yes.” The wolfhound growled quietly in the back of his throat. “There are … stuffed toys too.”

“Oh yeah,” Wax said. “Soonie cubs. I’ve seen those around.”

The growling grew louder, and Wax’s nervousness returned. Best not to taunt the immortal hound. He didn’t know how many of the legends of this creature were true, but if even a percentage were based in fact …

“So,” Wax said. “Guardian. You were waiting for me?”

“It was decided,” the kandra said, “that allowing a human to wander these caverns alone was unwise. I came myself. The others are busy.”

“Hunting Bleeder?”

“Counteracting her,” the kandra said, leading him to an intersection, then taking the right fork.

They walked in silence for a short time before Wax cleared his throat. “Um … do you mind explaining what you mean by that?”

The dog sighed, a discomforting sound. A talking dog was strange, but the sigh was just so *human*.

"I don't talk much these days," the kandra said. "I've … fallen out of practice, it seems. Paalm is trying to spark a revolution, using skills she learned from the Lord Ruler himself. But she is only one kandra. She has disdain for the rest of us, and therefore underestimates us in equal measure. We can do what she does, imitating people, appearing on the streets. For every 'priest' she has commit an atrocity, we will have dozens out tonight, preaching temperance and peace, pleading with the people not to listen to rumors."

"Wise," Wax said. He hadn't considered what the other kandra might be doing, other than vaguely assuming they were tracking Bleeder. This made good sense. Could he use it, somehow, in his investigation?

As they moved deeper into the caverns, Wax noted a crusty white substance growing on the rocks, the source of the powdery residue he'd found on Bleeder's clothing. Presumably, if he extinguished his lantern he'd be able to see the glow. He might not even need the lantern, but thinking of all this stone surrounding him—separating him from the mists above—he felt no urge to extinguish it.

The network of tunnels was far more extensive than he'd expected. He'd thought of this place only as that one cavern underneath the tomb—but that wasn't it at all. Harmony had assembled many different refuges of people as he remade the world, placing them all in the same area that was now Elendel. How much of the city did these tunnels stretch beneath? He passed a number of them that had flooded; what was the difference between those and the ones that remained dry?

As they wound through the tunnels, they passed an opening into a different large cavern. He raised his lantern to give it a glance, then froze in place. Instead of more rough, natural rock, his light illuminated dusty tiles and pillars, with parts of the floor torn up. Past them, there was what appeared to be a small *hut* of all things.

"TenSoon?" he asked as the kandra continued forward.

"Come along, human."

"Is that…"

"Yes. Many people hid in the basements of Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's palace. Sazed moved that here, as he did with all other caverns of refuge."

Wax couldn't pull himself away, gaping at history—no, *mythology*—come alive. The Lord Ruler's palace. Places where the Survivor and his followers had walked.

Rusts … the *Well of Ascension itself* would be in there.

“Human,” the kandra said, insistent. “There is something I wish for you to see. Come.”

Another time, Wax thought, turning from the entrance to lost Kredik Shaw and following TenSoon. “MeLaan said that the kandra don’t come down here often. Why not? Isn’t this your home?”

“It is a sacred place,” the wolfhound said. “Yes, it is home, but also a prison—and so much more. Under the Lord Ruler, we needed this place for freedom, to be ourselves. Outside, we were controlled, enslaved by men.”

Bitter, Wax thought. Even after hundreds of years, this creature was pained by the life it had led. Did he blame humankind? Did Bleeder?

“We come here,” TenSoon said, “when the mood strikes us. Usually we come alone, and infrequently. There are clubs up above where we can socialize now, being ourselves. Homes. Lives. The younger generations almost never visit this place. They prefer their lives as they are now, and don’t wish to remember the past. I suppose I’m the same, though for different reasons.”

Wax nodded, walking alongside the kandra as they penetrated ever deeper into the twisting tunnels of the Homeland. They passed many empty chambers, but some that held oddities, like two with old baskets and some discarded bones on the floor.

Wax had been in his fair share of tunnels out in the Roughs, but most of those had been some kind of man-made mine. These caverns were different. Those had smelled of dust and dirt, while this place somehow felt *alive*. Of water and fungus. Of patience.

The tunnels were knobby, yet smooth, like wax pooled beneath a long-burning candle. Holy ground. Everything else in the world, so far as he knew, had been completely remade during the Catacendre. But these caverns stretched back to eternity, as old as human memory. Older.

Eventually they reached a small chamber that didn’t seem quite as organic as the others. Had it been shaped, somehow, by kandra hands? TenSoon settled down on his haunches in the entrance to the room. Wax’s light glittered off the smooth, bulbous rock of the floor, which fell away into a series of pits. Perhaps three feet across, they looked like holes dug by prospectors foolishly hunting metals out in the Roughs.

Wax glanced at TenSoon.

“I passed by here on my way to meet with you,” the kandra said in his growling, half-human voice. “I smelled something wrong.”

Smelled something? Wax couldn’t catch any odd scents—but this whole place smelled strange to him. He stepped into the room, then noted something. One of the small pits was full. Were those sheets of paper?

Yes, they were. As Wax knelt at the rim of the pit, he was surprised to find hundreds of sheets of paper inside, jagged on one edge, as if they’d been ripped from a book. They contained cramped writing, with numbered verses. The Words of Founding.

Besides the normal writing, someone had scrawled all over these in brownish-red ink.

Blood, Wax thought. *It’s blood.*

He set down his lantern, then reached down and picked up a page. Book eighty, verses twenty-seven through fifty. Verses about Harmony’s quest for Truth.

Someone, likely Bleeder, had written all over them the words *Lies, lies, lies*.

Wax dug up other sheets. Most had something written on them, a word or phrase, though many were just smeared with blood. Something bothered Wax about it all, something that made his eye twitch. He couldn’t say what it was.

I was there, one sheet read. *Nobody,* said another. *It was,* said another. He started laying them out. TenSoon—whom he’d almost forgotten—sniffed in the doorway.

Wax glanced back. “Did you see these?”

“Yes,” TenSoon said.

“What do you make of them?”

“I … did not stay long,” the kandra said, then looked to the side. “I do not spend time in this room, human. I am not fond of it.”

This room … Wax felt cold. Was this the prison that TenSoon had been trapped in, locked away without bones, awaiting execution?

Rusts. He was kneeling in a place that had decided the fate of the world.

Wax stretched down, grabbing more of the sheets. It seemed like Bleeder had ripped apart an entire set of the Words of Founding—the unabridged version. Old edition too, judging by the fact that it had been handwritten instead of printed.

“You really knew her, didn’t you?” Wax asked. “The Ascendant Warrior?”

“I knew her,” TenSoon said softly. “Near the end, I spent over an hour without my spikes, and so my memories degraded. However, most of what I lost was from the time right before my fall. Most of my memories of her are crisp.”

Wax hesitated with stacks of pages in his hands. “What was she like? As a person, I mean.”

“She was strong and vulnerable all at once,” TenSoon whispered. “She was my last master, and my greatest. She had a way of pouring everything of herself into what she did. When she fought, she was the blade. When she loved, she was the kiss. In that regard, she was far more … human than any I have known.”

Wax found himself nodding as he settled the pages about him, in stacks based on whether they had words or not. The ones with fingerprints he set in their own stack. Perhaps they would be useful. Probably not. Bleeder *was* a shapeshifter, after all.

TenSoon eventually padded up to him. “They look,” TenSoon said, inspecting the sheets, “like they might say something if you string them together.”

“Yeah,” Wax said, dissatisfied.

“What is wrong?”

“It’s too much,” Wax said, waving his hand at it. “Too convoluted, too sensational. Why would she write on a bunch of pages, then rip them out and leave them here?”

“Because she’s mad.”

“No,” Wax said. “She’s not that kind of mad. The way she’s been working is too deliberate, too focused. Her *motives* might be insane, but her *methods* have been careful.” How could he explain it? This case had his instincts fighting with one another.

He tried again. “When someone leaves something like this behind, it means one of two things. They’re sloppy, or they’re trying too hard. She’s not sloppy, but I don’t think she’s trying to be cute either, dangling clues and playing games. When I talked to her…”

“You *spoke* with Paalm?” TenSoon demanded, his ears perking up. “When?”

“Earlier tonight,” Wax said. “There was something regretful about her. She claimed to not be playing games, but this seems like a game. A thousand discarded pages, left to be put back together and form a clue?” He shook his head. “I don’t buy it. Madness or not, she had to know that other kandra would eventually find this.”

“Very well,” TenSoon said, settling back down. “But she spoke to you as *herself,* not an imitation?”

“Yes. Is that odd? You’re doing it right now, and MeLaan seems to be acting no specific role either.”

“We are not Paalm,” TenSoon said. “As long as I’ve known her, she’s been subject to the performance. I was like that too, years ago. I didn’t know who I was if I was not imitating someone.”

Wax looked across the sheets. *Freedom,* one of them said in a scrawl across the page. *Will give you freedom whether you,* said another, only half of a thought.

“What was she like?” Wax asked. “Who *is* she, Guardian?”

“Hard to say,” TenSoon replied. “Paalm was the Lord Ruler’s pet kandra, a slave to his will and the contract we made with him. She ignored events surrounding the end of the World of Ash; she vanished, didn’t return to the Homeland. I assumed her dead, until she appeared among the survivors. Even then she separated herself from us, though she served Harmony as we all did. Until … nothing. Absence.”

“Freedom,” Wax said, tapping the page. “She talked about that with me. What does it mean?”

“I don’t know,” TenSoon said, voice even more a growl than before. “She has betrayed everything we are. But then, so did I. So perhaps we are a pair, she and I. Two of the oldest monsters remaining on this planet, now that many of the Seconds have taken the escape of ending their own lives.”

“Freedom…” Wax whispered. “Someone else moves us.… She left a note for me in the governor’s mansion. She removed a politician’s tongue, to stop his lies. Killed a priest through the eyes, to stop him from looking. Seeing. For who? For what?”

She had been the Lord Ruler’s kandra, moved about and danced at his whims. And then … Harmony’s servant? She lived with his voice inside her head, knowing all along that he could take control of her. How would that feel?

Would it make you remove one of your spikes? Would you be trying to bring that freedom to everyone? Misguided, in your insanity, certain that the world needed saving?

Wax stood up slowly. “It’s about Harmony.”

“Lawman?”

“She’s trying to bring down God Himself.”

“That’s insane.”

“Yes,” Wax said, turning to the kandra. “It is.” He started to pace in the small room. “Speak to Harmony and find out something for me. Did Bleeder first leave because Harmony tried to take control of her at some point? Did that set her off?”

A moment of silence. “Yes,” TenSoon replied. “Harmony says He didn’t try to control her directly, but He did push her very hard to do something she didn’t want to do.”

“She’s been persistent about this idea that all people are controlled.” *Harmony … was she Bloody Tan? Was she wearing his body, even back then? Was she there when I shot Lessie?* “She sees everyone as Harmony’s puppets—in her eyes, the politicians are His mouth. She’s bringing down the government for that reason. Religion? Harmony’s eyes, to watch over the people. She works to undermine that by creating strife between the religious sects.”

“Yes…” TenSoon said. “In a way, it could be seen as a continuation of the First Contract. Serve the Lord Ruler. Bring down the force that he worked to defeat. Harmony is half of that.”

“But what am I in this?” Wax continued, only half listening to TenSoon. “Why me? Why focus on—”

No, wrong question.

What was she going to do next? Eyes, tongue … ears, maybe? *Pretend she’s a step ahead of you,* Wax told himself. *Prepare for the worst.*

He looked again at the sheets on the floor. She wanted Wax out of the way. An elaborate puzzle? It was a time waster, a distraction. She’d ripped out these sheets not to tease him, but to remove him from the investigation long enough to accomplish the next phase of her plan. She’d *led* him here with that dust on her robe. She’d planted it there for that purpose.

“She knows,” Wax said softly. “She knows what you’re going to do, TenSoon. What you’ve *done*.” He felt cold, and met the kandra’s inhuman eyes. “She’s *planned* that you would send your kandra to try to win back the hearts and minds of the people. That exposes you. Her next step is to bring them down.”

* * *

Wayne wandered between two bonfires. Inside one, table and chair legs made sharp lines, like the shadowy limbs of corpses being burned. The mists didn’t get too close to the fires, though the smoke made a good imitator in the night. Like a beggar dressed up so nice, you only knew him for what he was when you got close enough to catch a proper whiff.

Wayne leaned in to one of the bonfires to light his cigar, though that required him to heal the skin of his arm as it burned. He smelled both of his own singed hair and of the scent of the fire. Polished furniture didn’t burn clean. He liked feeling the heat though. Made him feel alive.

He had stopped filling his metalminds, hoping he had enough health for what was coming. He couldn’t afford to be weak or sickly right now. Not with what was happening.

He leaned back away from the flames and settled the cigar between his teeth. It was a fancy type, from the governor’s own hidden stash. Wayne took a long puff before remembering that he hated the rusting things. Ah well. He hadn’t traded anything good for it. Just one of Wax’s forks.

The crowd gathering here in the square was the biggest he’d seen this night. They clumped in the bonfire light like a flock of ravens drawn to a kill. Wayne moved up to the back of the crowd and handed his cigar to someone there. He left her standing, baffled, as he dove into the crowd.

With a crowd this big, you couldn’t move *through* them, but *with* them. You hadda pull the crowd on like a good coat, snug and tight, then let the cloth give you some direction. Wayne shuffled when the people shuffled, and shouted at the proper points, giving just the right drunken slur to his speech. He gave back a friendly elbow when one nudged him, and before too long he neared the front. Here, above everyone else, a shirtless fellow in trousers and suspenders stood atop a fountain statue, holding on to the Survivor’s spear for balance, his other fist raised toward the crowd.

“They rob us blind!” the man shouted.

Aye, that’s true, Wayne thought, shouting along with the crowd’s roar of agreement.

“They expect us to work long hours every day, but then when it ain’t convenient for them, they just cut us loose and don’t care none if we starve.”

Yeah, they do, Wayne thought, joining in the cursing and shouting.

“They do each other favors,” the man bellowed. “They suck us dry, then gather to throw lavish parties!”

I’ve been to those parties, Wayne thought. *Good sandwiches.*

“Would the Survivor have stood for this?”

Probably not, Wayne admitted. As the crowd surged around him, Wayne folded his arms and thought. Sure, bringing down a homicidal shapeshifter was important and all, but *rusts,* this seemed a bad time to be hanging around with conners and noblemen. Listening to this speech, he was half inclined to string *himself* up, which was really disturbing, since he was generally suicidal only in the mornings.

He was about to turn away and flow back toward the mansion to talk with MeLaan about this when something changed. A new figure climbed up onto the statue: an older, balding man who was a little thick around the waist, but in a friendly-type way. He wore ornate robes that frayed like a mistcoat at the bottom. A Survivorist priest?

The older man held up a pleading hand, and the fellow who had been shouting bowed his head in acknowledgment and stepped back. Beneath the giant image of the Survivor, his priest would be heard. Wayne felt a disturbance stir within him, like his stomach discovering he’d just fed it a bunch of rotten apples. Religion worried him. It could ask men to do things they’d otherwise never do.

“I come to you,” the priest said into the night, “understanding and sympathetic. But I implore you, do not invoke the Survivor’s name for looting and destruction. There is a way to fight back, and I will join you in it, but these are not the days of the Lord Ruler’s tyranny. You have the ability to make your voice heard. You can send advocates to the government for you.”

The crowd hushed. A few men shouted out expletives, explaining exactly what they wanted to do to the governor, but most grew quiet.

“The Survivor said that we should smile,” the priest pled. “He taught that we should not let our sorrows drag us down no matter how bad life became.”

The mood of the crowd was shifting. They shuffled instead of shouted. Wayne relaxed. Well, maybe religion *was* good for something other than fancy clothes and weird hats. If that priest defused this group, Wayne would buy him a drink, he would. And buying drinks for priests was great, because they usually wouldn’t drink theirs, so you got two for yourself to …

Wait. Why was that fellow in the suspenders—the one who had talked before—sneaking up behind the priest? Raising his hand, as if to—

“No!” Wayne shouted, shoving through the crowd toward the fountain. He froze time, which caused quite a mess of confusion in the people around him, but it didn’t do much. All that let him do was stand there feeling helpless, knowing the priest was too far away to save. The fellow in the suspenders stood just behind the gentle old man, hand raised, knife glittering in the firelight.

Except that wasn't no knife. It was a *needle*.

Wayne dropped his speed bubble. The needle plunged down, striking the priest in the back. The round-faced man jerked upright, and then his flesh started to *melt*. It turned translucent, his eyes drooping out of their sockets, crystal bones beneath glittering in the light of the bonfires.

"Look!" the bare-chested man said. "See what they send to try to placate you? The Faceless Immortals serve the nobility! This was no priest, but one of their minions. They want you to believe you're free, that their democracy works for you, but all that surrounds you is lies!"

Wayne gaped as the priest—no, the kandra—struggled to stand upright and speak, but that made it worse. The protesters shouted, their rowdiness back with renewed strength, save for near Wayne, where the people were still confused as to why time had stopped for them.

A woman in a dirty skirt eyed him. "Hey, aren't you that guy from the Roughs?"

Wayne grimaced, backing away. On the fountain, the leader spotted him and interrupted his diatribe. He pointed right at Wayne. "One of them is here!" he shouted. "They send constables into our midst! They're all around, controlling you!"

Basically the entire crowd turned to look at Wayne.

Well, hell.

Contact S.T., 15 Stranat Place.

gangs of street urchins to de-

roads and long straightaways,

(Continued on Back.)

for any person in the room. Had I not bested the tribes at the Pits of Eltania? Was I not the first to bring back tales of the slopes of the Ashmounts, now gone green with vegetation? And wasn't it I that had domesticated the fabled long-necked horses of the Plains of Kaermeron?

"I shall not lower this gun," said the man, "until you pay for your crimes."

My enhanced senses picked up a faint tremor in the man's speech. I noticed the almost imperceptible flicks of his eyes to the right and left. This wasn't one of the Cobblesguilder henchmen as I'd at first thought. He was a man looking for revenge, and he wasn't entirely sure if I was the one from whom he should exact it.

"Let us talk this through peaceably," I suggested. I gently removed Lady Lavont's trembling fingers from my arm. "All will be solved, my lady," I said, detecting a faint gasp in her breathing as my fingers brushed hers for so short a moment.

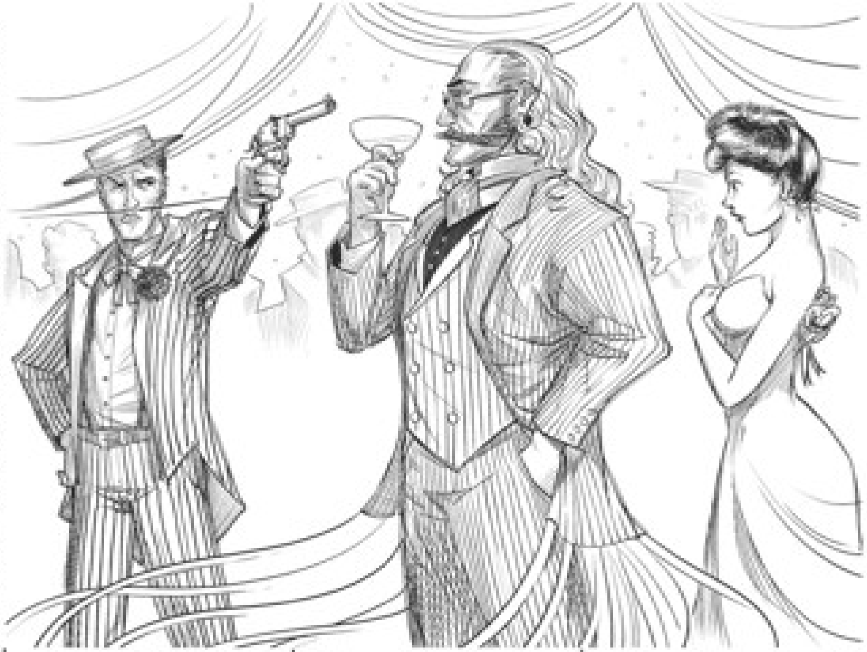
Mustaches straightened. "You killed my brother three years back in the Roughs near Covingtar," he said.

I needed time to think on his accusation, so I stepped forward, raised my hands in the air, and said, "As you can see, I am unarmed." I turned in a circle, displaying to the crowd that I in fact held no sidearm. And yes, bravely, I turned my back on Mustaches, trusting in his uncertainty of my identity.

As I turned, I thought through my predicament. It was true that some three years back I had found myself in the vicinity of Covingtar. But had I killed someone's brother there? No doubt I had left many a man brotherless, but never intentionally. The very thought of killing a man for the express purpose of leaving another man brotherless is highly repugnant to me.

"I am not the man you seek," I said, raising my glass for another sip because, by the Faceless, if I was going to die I would do it drinking a fine Chamblis Montreau 328.

The gun barrel shook more. If my gambit failed, I would sport yet another bullet scar on my strapping abdomen. Skin and muscle would heal, but the finely-woven shirt had been a gift from the daughter of the owner of Gilles & Gilles—on the corner of Canton Avenue and Troncheau Way—tailors of exquisite and tasteful dress shirts for fashionable and high society types. I did not wish it to be spoiled with my worthy blood.



"Then who are you?" asked Mustaches, his gun's barrel dropping more. The moment of danger was not yet over, but my own breathing evened out. My enhanced senses found Mustache's gazelle-quick heartbeat slowing to a more reasonable pace.

"Gentleman Jak," I said with humility. "Surely you have heard of me."

"So you ain't that Waxillium Ladrian fellow?"

"By the Survivor, no!" My anger rose without warning. Many a man had met the righteous end of my knuckles for such a comment, but here in the barely civilized reaches of the Outer Cities, I knew I musn't punish this ill-informed yokel for his folly.

"My good man, no," I said more calmly and letting out a generous laugh. He shakily reholstered his pistol. A crooked smile began beneath those knifelike mustaches of his. I approached him like I would a prairie lion, but heartbeats later I was slapping him on the back like an old friend (and narrowly avoiding the end of one of his mustaches piercing me through the right earlobe, a hole that no doubt would make the honorable Handerwym jealous of the metalminds I might hang there).

"A drink," I roared. "A drink for my friend! For I too would pull a gun on Waxillium Ladrian were I to meet him in person!"

Danger averted, Lady Lavont came again to my side, a tinkle of laughter on her lips. Then I noticed over the crowd two pairs of waving arms that I immediately recognized as Handerwym's. In trying to get my attention over the pressing crowd in the room, he shook his arms in so aggravated a fashion that one of his metalminds flew from his wrist and landed like an Outer Cities cataract diver into the sparkle punch, spraying red droplets all in a mottle upon Lady Lavont's pastel satin evening gown.

My dependable steward's convulsing could only be interpreted one way. During my diversion with Mustaches, the Lord Mistborn's only remaining buttons had been stolen, swapped for the indistinguishable duplicates, and neither I nor Handerwym had been in a position to intercept the perpetrators.

I needed my enhanced senses to seek out the thieves, but I had just used my last modicum of tin to help defuse Mustaches' desire to bring me face to face with Old Ironeyes.

I pushed through the crowd toward the only source of reliable tin in the room. The Lord Mistborn's clasps of wasing, which I now knew to be counterfeit—

—Continued next week!!—

THE BEST OF THE BASIN!
Gentleman Jak Recommends a
Chamblis 328
with a box of
Doxonar Brand Cigars

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21

“Ashfalls!” TenSoon said as he ran alongside Wax through the tunnels of the kandra Homeland. “I have told Harmony to pass the word to my fellows. We will stop our efforts immediately, but He says it might be too late.”

Wax nodded, holding his lantern and puffing from exertion.

“We’re Harmony’s ears,” TenSoon growled. “That fits with her theme, doesn’t it? We listen, move among you, report back to God. She’s going to try to deafen Him.”

Wax nodded again.

“That’s pointless!” TenSoon said. “She can’t stop Harmony. Even with all of this, she’s just a child throwing rocks at a *mountain* to try to move it.”

“Yeah,” Wax said, scrambling over some rubble. Pieces of the kandra Homeland had obviously suffered from being shoved about in the earth during the Catacendre. Walls had collapsed, then had lain here, broken, for hundreds of years. “But she’s not really trying to *kill* God. She just wants to free people from Him, in her twisted way.”

“Free them?” TenSoon said. He was silent for a time. “Emotion. That’s it, isn’t it? Vin liberated koloss by making them feel powerful emotions. It gave an opening into their souls, let her break through another’s control and seize the creatures.”

“That’s what the old stories say,” Wax replied. “Good to have confirmation.”

“Humans aren’t Hemalurgic creations like koloss. Powerful emotion won’t ‘free’ them from Harmony.”

“Sure it will,” Wax said. “At least in Bleeder’s eyes. If you’re in a rage, you’re not following Harmony’s careful plans. You’re out of control. She’s going to drive this city to madness in an insane attempt to liberate it.”

“Ruin!” TenSoon growled. “I may have to leave you behind, lawman. I must reach my people quickly and speak with them about what is happening.”

“Fine,” Wax said. “But I might keep up better than you assume, so long as I—”

A shrill howl echoed through the corridor, so chilling that Wax pulled to a stop. He drew Vindication, lantern held high in his off hand. The howl was joined by others, a terrible cacophony, each sound jarring against the others.

TenSoon leaned low, growling as the howls faded.

“What the hell was that?” Wax said.

“I have never heard its like before, human.”

“Aren’t you over a thousand years old?”

“Something like that,” TenSoon said.

“Holy *hell*,” Wax repeated. “Another way out?”

The kandra took off, leading him back the way they had come. The howls started up again, louder. The tight tunnels and uneven stones suddenly seemed far more confining.

Wax ran and, despite his earlier bravado, found he had real trouble keeping up with TenSoon. The stone around them didn’t contain any metals, at least not in a pure enough form for him to Push on. Besides, the tunnels twisted and turned too much for long Pushes.

So he ran, holding on to his lantern with sweating fingers, listening as the things behind seemed to grow more excited. Distracted as he was, he almost crashed into TenSoon when he caught up to him standing still in the tunnel.

“What?” Wax asked, panting from his run.

“It smells wrong ahead,” TenSoon said. “They’re waiting for us.”

“Great,” Wax said. “What are they?”

“They smell like men,” TenSoon said.

More howls came from behind.

“Those,” Wax said, “are *men*?”

“Come,” TenSoon said, turning and scrambling away, his claws scratching on stone.

Wax followed. “Another way out?” he asked again.

TenSoon didn’t answer, instead leading them in a sprint through small caverns, around corners, through tunnels. They stopped at an intersection, TenSoon considering their options while Wax fingered his gun nervously. He swore he could see something moving down the tunnel they’d left behind, the one where TenSoon claimed to have spotted an ambush.

“TenSoon…” he said, nervous.

“This way,” the kandra said, dashing off.

Wax followed, entering a longer tunnel. Perfect. He let himself lag behind, holding up the lantern, trying to get a glimpse of whatever was following.

His light reflected from eyes in the shadows. Figures that were bent low, scrambling on all fours, moving in a distinctly inhuman way. Sweating, Wax dropped a shell casing and shoved it with his foot into a cleft in the rock. He Pushed, throwing himself down the corridor to catch up with TenSoon, landing just before they took a corner at speed.

“They’re *not* human,” Wax said. “Not completely.”

“Hemalurgy,” TenSoon said. “This is terrible. Paalm … She has gone further than I had assumed. She doesn’t just kill. She Ruins.”

“They’re almost upon us,” Wax said, clutching gun and lantern. “How do we get out?”

“We don’t,” TenSoon said, ducking to the side and into a small chamber. “We fight.”

Wax followed, but stopped in the doorway, gun at the ready. They’d passed this room before, or one like it. It was filled with small baskets—glancing at them now, he could see they were full of bones.

The things chasing them had started yipping, but he could hear them scrambling on the stone—could hear them breathing in excited gasps—as they drew close.

Inside the room, TenSoon transformed.

It happened in a burst, the kandra’s skin sloughing off his canine bones and splashing to the ground like a bucket of slop tossed out the back of a kitchen. The muscles and melting skin slapped against one of the baskets, tipping it, dumping bones.

MeLaan had said he was fast, but that word didn't begin to describe the sudden motion as TenSoon absorbed the bones. Arms sprouted from the side of his mass, then lifted it into the air even as legs formed beneath, thick like those of a wrestler. A skull emerged like a bubble rising through molasses, filling in with muscles stretched against bone, a jaw shifting into place.

In seconds, a short but robust figure stood in the chamber. The face of stretched skin and muscle reminded Wax of a koloss, but those forearms were like hammers, and the chest superhumanly powerful. It was nude, though the crotch lacked genitals of either variety.

Wax looked back down the corridor outside and raised his pistol, sweating. The things prowled closer. Heads emerged from the darkness, faces that twisted human features into something more canine. He counted five total. These creatures were no longer bipedal, but traces of humanity laced them—fingers that were too long, hands with opposable thumbs. The joints bent the wrong way at the elbows and knees, and the eyes … the eyes were dead. Pure black.

"What has she done to you?" Wax whispered at them.

The creatures didn't respond. Either they could not think, could not speak, or didn't care to do either. Wax fired upward, half hoping that the sound would scare the things away, send them scuttling back into the night.

The greater part of him hoped they would remain, so he could finish off every last one of the poor bastards.

The single shot rang loud in the tunnel, but the beasts didn't flee. Instead they surged forward, their reluctance giving way to frenzy. Wax leveled Vindication and unloaded at the first creatures, aiming for skulls. Flashes of gunfire lit the tunnel. Though his bullets tore off skin and left streaks of bleeding muscle, not one of the creatures dropped.

Wax ducked back into the room, holstering Vindication and setting his lantern on an outcropping. "Their skulls have been thickened," he shouted to TenSoon while reaching for his Sterrion.

The kandra stepped past him, both lithe and powerful. Wax could almost hear the muscles constricting, pulling taught beneath that skin. As the first creature entered, TenSoon smashed it on the side of the head, pinning it to the wall with one hand. Then he stepped back and raised his foot to *crush* the skull against the rocks.

The others leaped over TenSoon, dragging him down, biting his flesh. He grabbed at one, ripping it free by the hind legs and hurling it away. Wax fired, aiming for the eyes.

"They have been created to fight you," TenSoon growled from the ground, where he wrestled with one of the creatures while others tore at him. "Flee. Your modern weapons are useless here, lawman!"

Like hell they are, Wax thought, dropping his Sterrion and reaching to the large holster on his thigh, bringing out his short-barreled shotgun. He pulled out a handful of shells and tossed them to the floor with a sound like rain. Then he waded in, slapping the first monster that came at him across the face with the shotgun. It flinched, then howled—baring rows of uneven teeth.

Wax shoved the shotgun into its mouth and fired.

Bits of it colored the wall, and as it fell—thrashing—it knocked over baskets, spilling bones to the rock floor. The one creature's death caught the attention of others, who turned from the bleeding TenSoon and charged Wax.

Wax naturally preferred the pistol. A handgun was an extension of one's focus, a weapon of precision—like a thrown coin in anteverdant days. The soul of the Coinshot, his will made manifest.

The shotgun was something different; it wasn't an extension of focus or will, but it *did* do a good job of representing his rage.

Wax shouted, slamming his shotgun across the face of one beast and Pushing on the barrel, giving the swing incredible momentum. The blow flung the creature to the side as Wax spun and pumped his gun, then blasted at the leg of the next one, ripping its arm free at the shoulder and sending it face-first into the stone.

He leaped over the next one that came for him, Pushing on a fallen bullet for lift. He fired a shotgun slug down into the beast's back, stunning it, then multiplied his weight and landed with a crunch.

The thing thrashed and writhed beneath him as another leaped at his throat. He pumped and shot it in the head, then Pushed on the slug. His weight still increased—draining his metalmind at a furious rate—that bullet didn't stop at the skull as the others had. It split bone and made a mess of the brain.

Wax sidestepped that corpse as it flopped beside him, then swung his shotgun upward into the head of the last beast coming for him. It flipped backward, exposing the belly.

Wax fired three times, emptying the shotgun. The underbelly was soft, as he'd hoped. The thing went down.

He stood, breathing deeply, the rhythm of the fight having consumed him. Nearby, TenSoon rolled over, the wounds to his arms and sides resealing. He had killed another of the things by ripping it in half. His eyes were wide as he regarded Wax. His bloodied face looked as inhuman as those of the creatures they'd just fought.

TenSoon climbed to his feet, surveying the wreckage. The lantern still burned calmly, illuminating bones scattered across the floor and masses that had once—horribly—been human, but now just twitched. Wax felt sick. He'd called them "things" in his head, but these had been people. TenSoon was right. What Bleeder had done here was worse, somehow, than even her murders.

"I will need to ask Harmony," TenSoon said, "if I have failed Him in killing this day." His voice was the same gravelly growl as before, when he'd inhabited the wolfhound's body.

"Why would he care?" Wax said, still sick. "He uses me to kill all the time."

"You are His Ruin," TenSoon said. "I am His Preservation."

Wax stood in silence amid the dead and dying and lowered his shotgun, trying to suppress the immediate feeling of *indignation* he felt. Was that all he was to Harmony? A killer? A destroyer?

"Still," TenSoon said, picking his way through the room and speaking as if he didn't realize the insult he'd just offered, "I do not think Harmony will mind what I have done. These poor souls…" He knelt and prodded at one of the bodies Wax had killed.

TenSoon came up with a thin piece of metal, silvery and perhaps as long as a finger. Did it have a red cast to it, or was that just the blood? He used steelsight and found that while he could see the spike, the line was duller than it should have been. Hemalurgy.

"One spike," TenSoon said, turning it over. "Any more, and Harmony might have been able to control these beasts. How could such a change be effected by a single spike? This is a level of Hemalurgy beyond my understanding, lawman."

Wax shook his head, checking on the creatures. Not to see if they were still a threat, but to make sure he didn't leave one of them here to die a protracted death. He found one woman still alive, paralyzed by his shot into her back. She watched him with those eyes, shaped like a person's, yet alien and dark. Whatever else had happened to these people, they should have been able to keep their eyes.

Wax put his gun to the woman's eye and fired, up into the brain. Then he closed his eyes and offered … what? A prayer to Harmony? Harmony hadn't helped these people.

I have done something to help.… The words whispered to him from the past. A memory of the last time Harmony had spoken to him. *I sent you.*

Wax wasn't certain if that was enough this time.

"Tell me you'll see these people buried," Wax said.

"I will," TenSoon said as a howl sounded in the distance. "More come. Do we fight here, or run?"

"Can you get us out?" Wax asked, reloading the shotgun.

"Perhaps. Not by a conventional method, but there could be a way."

"Then let's go," Wax said. "This is another distraction, TenSoon. Those creatures only came for us when we left the other chamber."

TenSoon nodded, dropping his body to the floor and absorbing the wolfhound's bones again. Only seconds passed before he'd restored himself, save for the hair. That started to sprout from the skin as TenSoon moved to the door, coming in waves as the kandra's body arranged it and pushed it out.

Wax grabbed his lantern and they fled, TenSoon again leading the way.

* * *

"There he goes, boys!" Wayne yelled, pointing into the darkness. "I saw that dirty conner right ahead. You go that way, I'll head around the other way, and we'll trap 'im between us, we will!"

The small force of men with him—armed with wrenches and brooms—split off in a cheering, clangorous mass of spit and vengeance. Wayne egged them on while backward-jogging in the other direction. Eventually he slowed, finally alone, and shook his head. Not bad fellows, for all the fact that they had the combined wits of a brick.

Wayne spun a dueling cane in his fingers, rounding back through an alleyway and popping out near the governor's mansion. He didn't go toward the front—more and more angry people were gathering there, and some might recognize him from before. On his head he wore a newsboy's cap, his other hat carefully stowed in a bush along the way. That was fine; he liked this new cap well enough, but he felt naked in another way—he was out of bendalloy. Completely dry.

That was bad. No more stopping time unless Wax had an extra vial for him. The fellow often carried one.

Wayne slipped around the mansion, intending to head toward the back doors, where he hoped the guards would let him in. He'd wasted time, far too much, getting away from that crowd. The sight of that poor kandra melting in front of everyone else haunted him.

Rusts. He wasn't sure which side of the argument he came down on, but at least he wasn't going around melting people for an audience. Besides, for the moment he figured he'd choose the side that *wasn't* actively trying to kill him.

He strolled and stuck a new ball of gum into his mouth. Then he hesitated, mists swirling around him, the mansion looming before him like a mesa in the Roughs, lit up all white. He heard a voice drifting toward him.

The accent was wrong. Just *slightly* wrong, but in a profound way.

And suddenly he knew who Bleeder was impersonating.

* * *

The howls were distant from Wax, but they haunted him more than they had during the first chase, for now he knew what made them. If he survived this, he would have to see something done for these creatures.

TenSoon conducted them through the intestines of the Homeland, eventually reaching a wall full of cracks. Wax raised his lantern, inspecting it. The wolfhound beside him had a pelt that was missing hair in patches.

"Well?" Wax said, inspecting the dead end.

"We have been watching this spot," TenSoon said. "It cracked long ago, and the cracks seem to have widened over the years. If it opens, it will provide another path into the Homeland, and we wish to be aware of each of those."

Wax ran his fingers along the cracks in the stone wall. Air moved through them, he thought, catching a whiff of something more … rotten. More like the city he knew. Familiar and disgusting all at once.

He tapped his metalmind, increasing his weight, then threw his shoulder against the wall. This was tricky, as his strength hadn't increased except in its ability to lift his own limbs and manipulate his heavier muscles. That lent him some ability, but mostly he had to try to force things just right so that he was *falling* into the wall as much as pushing on it.

He finally got the correct leverage, shoving through the cracked rock and causing a clatter. He was able to pick his way through into a narrow rift, like a very thin slot canyon out in the Roughs. The walls were slick with water, and knobby as in so much of this underground realm.

“What now?” Wax asked.

“Now we climb, human,” TenSoon said. He melted again, dumping his bones and fur to the ground, becoming a group of muscles. Here, in these narrow confines, that was an advantage. TenSoon was able to push on both walls and start sliding up the crack, filling holes and clefts with his mass, then using his muscles to propel himself upward. A bag, like a stomach, had formed around the wolfhound bones, and he carted these up behind him.

It was grotesque yet fascinating. This was the natural state of the kandra, the sludgelike collection of muscles that at times acted human.

Of course, Wax thought, starting to climb, *what am I but a pile of blood and meat that gets up and walks around?*

This climb was difficult, particularly with the lantern, though decreasing his weight substantially helped. After only a short time, he heard the creatures come in below, howling and scrambling. His heart beat more quickly, but they didn’t seem to have much luck climbing. He continued to inch upward, until—in his haste for a handhold—he fumbled with the lantern and dropped it.

It bumped and clanged against the stones before smashing down below. The light went out.

In that moment, Wax realized he was buried in the earth, clinging to rocks in the darkness. The walls seemed to press against him, and twisted monsters howled below and sought his blood. He gasped in sudden panic.

Then his eyes adjusted and a soft blue light revealed the world to him. He wasn’t trapped. There was a way out above. He could see it by the patina of blue fungus growing on the walls, giving a gentle light to everything.

“Harmony made sure it spread here,” TenSoon’s voice said from above. “He wanted to make certain that no person was ever trapped in darkness in this place again.”

Wax forced himself to continue upward. He recognized where he was now, from the stories. The holes in the walls that he used as handholds had once been overgrown with crystals, and within, geodes containing a bead of the lost metal. Legendary atium.

He was climbing the Pits of Hathsin themselves.

“Peace, lawman,” TenSoon said from above. “Keep climbing.”

Had he heard Wax’s breathing quicken? He steadied himself and continued. This place was no longer a prison. No more did it cut and lacerate, as it had done to the Survivor’s arms. The climb was actually easy, with all those holes. The sounds from below grew softer.

Finally, he crawled from the crevice into a section of man-made tunnel. One of the city sewers; the crack behind him was just a thin cleft in the rock that gave no hint of its ancient origin. Wax shivered, breathing in the awful stench of the sewers, but still glad to be free. TenSoon convulsed as a mass nearby, then formed into a wolfhound again. “I can see why Paalm might want me distracted and unable to stop my people from being caught in her trap,” he said. “But what happened below, that was not for me, but you, human. What was she trying to distract you from?”

Wax didn’t reply, but could think of only one reason. Once she dealt with the kandra, her plan would be ready for the final steps. She’d need to drive the people of the city further into a frenzy, freeing them, as she saw it, sending them forth as a mob to rage and hate, destroying Elendel.

The governor was planning to speak to the people of the city. Bleeder hadn’t succeeded in killing him yet, and Wax suspected he knew why.

Because when she murdered him, she wanted an audience.

PART THREE

22

Mist seemed to burn in the night, like clouds before the sun. Wax dropped through it, slamming to the steps of the governor's mansion, surprising the guards there. Constables, by the uniforms, rather than the normal guards. Good. They'd been running low on the latter.

Wax stood up straight, turning and regarding the crowd gathering in front of the mansion. Constables with rifles made an uneasy barrier between them and the building. Nearby, workers erected a small stage on the steps. Aradel supervised, though judging from his sour expression, he was rather displeased with the governor's plan.

Wax agreed. Addressing the crowd would be playing right into Bleeder's hands. He grabbed one of the constables. "I assume there hasn't been another attempt on the governor's life?"

"No, sir," the constable said. "He's in his study, sir."

Wax nodded and barged into the mansion, trailing wisps of mist behind him. He stalked toward the back, and in the hallway Marasi intercepted him, taking him by the arm. "Kolossblood," she said, giving him the password he'd given her, proving she wasn't a kandra.

“Nighttime Summer,” Wax said back, authenticating himself. “You need to do something about that crowd, Marasi. They’re going to rip this city down.”

“We’re working on it. Have you seen Wayne?”

“No. Why?”

“MeLaan says he went out to inspect the protesters. That was over half an hour ago. Nobody has seen him since.”

“He’ll turn up,” Wax said. “I need to talk to the governor.”

Marasi nodded, but held on to his arm as he tried to walk toward the study. “Wax,” she said softly, “he’s corrupt. *Really* corrupt. I’ve found proof.”

Wax drew in a deep breath. “Let’s survive this night. Then we’ll do something about that.”

“My thoughts are similar,” Marasi said, “but I think Bleeder wants to put us in a difficult position—perhaps she wants to force us to let the governor die.”

“Not going to happen,” Wax said. “We’ll hand him over to the courts, but not a mob. Have you checked on your sister?”

“No,” Marasi said. “But I’ve been intending to.”

“Do so,” Wax said. “I’ll look in on your father after talking to the governor. I don’t want either showing up as an unexpected hostage.”

“As long as it isn’t me, for a change,” Marasi said with a grimace. “MeLaan is wearing the body of the guard with the sling. She’s furious the governor won’t let her or the others in. I’m going to go see if I can track down Wayne; wouldn’t be surprised to find him on the front row of the mob.”

She let go of his arm and headed toward the exit.

“Marasi,” Wax said after her.

“Hm?”

“The uniform,” he said. “It suits you. Don’t know if I’ve had a chance to mention that.”

She blushed—she *was* Marasi after all—before continuing. Wax turned and strode down the hallway toward the door to the governor’s study. MeLaan lounged there with a group of three other guards.

“Nobody is to enter, lawman,” one of them said with an annoyed tone. “He’s been in there composing a speech for the last hour. He won’t—”

Wax walked past them and tried the door, which was locked. He could hear Innate's voice inside, going over a speech. Wax increased his weight and flung the door open with Allomancy, splintering the doorframe. Innate stood inside, holding a pad of paper and pacing as he talked. He froze midstride and spun on Wax, then relaxed visibly.

"You could have knocked," the governor said.

"And you could have ignored a knock," Wax said, walking in and swinging the door shut behind him. It didn't latch, of course, after what Wax had done. "What do you think you're doing, Innate? You could have been killed in here, quietly, alone without anyone to help."

"And what would they have done?" Innate demanded, tossing his pad onto his desk. He walked up, then spoke more softly: "Wind's whisper."

"Drunken steam," Wax said back, latest passphrases exchanged. Innate was authentic. "Locking your guards out was foolhardy. They would have fought for you, protected you. We chased her off one time before."

"*You* chased her off," Innate said, walking back to his desk and picking up his pad. "The rest were useless. Even poor Drim." He went back to his pacing, speaking the lines of his speech to himself and practicing emphasis.

Wax fumed, feeling dismissed. This was the man they struggled to protect? Wax made his way to the window. It was open, surprisingly, letting in wisps of mist. They didn't travel far. He'd heard legends of the mists filling rooms, but that rarely happened.

He leaned against the window, looking out at the darkness, listening with half an ear to Innate's speech. It was inflammatory and dismissive. He claimed to feel the problems the people had, but called them peasants.

This would just make things worse. *She wants that,* Wax thought. *She wants to free the city from Harmony by making it angry.*

She knew what Innate was going to say. Of *course* she knew. She'd been leading them around this entire time. Every clue Wax had found so far had been carefully planted for him. So what did he do? Stop Innate's speech? What if *that* was what she wanted?

He tapped his finger on the windowsill. Tap. Tap.

Squish.

He looked down, then blinked. A wad of chewed gum had been stuck here. Wax lifted his finger, and—as he contemplated it—something started to fall into place. Something he'd been missing. Bleeder had set this all up from the start.

Wax's suspicions had begun because she'd deliberately alerted him by wearing Bloody Tan's face. That had been a conscious ploy on her part, a way to start the festivities. Everything was moving on her timetable.

Bleeder had had everything already in place when this night arrived. She'd been planning this for a long time. Far longer than he'd assumed.

So where was the best place to hide?

Rusts.

Wax reached for his gun and spun.

He found himself facing down Governor Innate, who had taken out a sidearm and leveled it. "Damn it, Wax," the governor said. "Just a few minutes more and I'd have had this. You see too far. You can always see a *little* too far."

Wax froze there, hand on his gun. He met the governor's eyes, and hissed out slowly. "You knew the passphrase," Wax whispered, "but of course you did. I gave it to you. When did you kill him? How long has the city been ruled by an impostor?"

"Long enough."

"The governor wasn't your target. You think bigger than that—I should have seen. But Drim … He was in the saferoom when you entered below. Is that why you killed him? No. He'd have known you were gone."

"He knew all along," Bleeder said. "He was mine. But tonight, I killed him because of you, Wax. You'd shot me up…"

"You had on the governor's clothing underneath the cloak," Wax said. "Rusts! I'd bloodied you. So you needed an excuse for why the governor was covered in blood, an excuse to pull off your shirt and stanch a wound."

She held the gun on him, immobile. The weapon didn't register to his Allomancy. Aluminum. She was prepared, of course. But she seemed torn. She didn't want to kill him. She'd never wanted to kill him, for some reason.

So Wax yelled for help.

It was risky, but nothing ever ended well when you obeyed the person with the gun on you. As he'd suspected, Bleeder didn't shoot at him as the door burst open. Wax pulled out his gun and fired at Bleeder, to distract her as he dug in his gunbelt for the last needle that MeLaan had given him.

The guards turned their guns toward Wax and started firing.

Idiot, he thought, throwing himself toward the governor's desk for cover. Of course they'd do that. "Wait!" he said. "The governor has been taken. Don't—"

Bleeder gunned down the guards. Wax rolled behind the desk, but still heard it as they cried out in shock, their own governor—so far as they knew—shooting them down. Wax winced, cursing. Those deaths were upon him.

“I guess the rest of the constables will be upon us soon,” Bleeder said. “They’re not free yet. Neither are you, despite how I’ve tried.…”

Wax peeked up over the desk, then ducked down again as she swung the gun toward him. The governor’s face was twisted in a mask of anger and frustration.

“Why couldn’t you have given me a little longer?” she demanded. “So close. Now I have to kill you, claim you were the kandra, and blame you for shooting my guards. That way I can still talk to the crowd, free them.…”

Yet she didn’t come for him. She still seemed upset. Best to take advantage of that.

“MeLaan, go!” Wax shouted, then Pushed on the nails in the floor, flinging himself up into the air.

One of the corpses at Bleeder’s feet grabbed her around the legs.

Wax Pushed off the wall, leaping toward Bleeder. She growled, then slapped his hand as he landed, knocking the needle free. Rusts, she was *strong*. She kicked MeLaan off as Wax dove for the fallen needle.

She became a blur. As he tried to grab the needle, Bleeder snatched it and spun around, slamming it down into MeLaan’s shoulder. It was done in an eyeblink.

Then she lurched to a stop. She seemed jarred by the motion. Her metalmind storage, at long last, had run dry.

Wax pulled out his gun and fired, lying with his back on the floor. The bullets ripped her skin, but did nothing else. Nearby, MeLaan’s shape distorted—face drooping and the skin going transparent.

Wax lay on the ground, his emptied gun pointed at Bleeder, whose skin reformed from the wounds. They stared at one another for an extended moment before boots in the hallway outside made Bleeder curse, then dash for the window. Wax grabbed his other gun, following, then threw himself down as shots sounded outside.

He waited a moment, then glanced up, but didn’t spot her in the swirling mists. Wax cursed, rolling his arm in its socket. Rusts. That bullet hole he’d taken earlier in the night was bleeding again, and the pain was returning. He thought he’d chewed enough painkiller to keep it away.

“You all right?” he asked MeLaan, who had managed to sit up.

“Yeah,” she said, though the word was mangled by her melted face. “I made them do this to me once to test it out. I’ll be fine in a few minutes.”

“Thanks for the save,” Wax said, anxiously scanning the room for hidden compartments with his steelsight. Quivering lines in the closet. Could he be so lucky? He rushed over and yanked it open.

Wayne—tied securely and gagged—tumbled out and hit the floor with a thump. He was alive, thank Harmony. Wax knelt down, sighed in relief, and loosened the gag. Wayne looked like he’d been stabbed in the leg, and his metalminds had been stripped away so he couldn’t heal, but he was alive.

“Wax!” Wayne said. “It’s the governor. Bugger’s got the same ‘a’ as MeLaan!”

“I know,” Wax said. “You’re lucky. She probably wanted to harvest your Metalborn abilities with spikes, otherwise she’d have killed you right off. Why didn’t you warn anyone?”

“Was going to, but I needed to check first. Got too close to the window, and she rusting came right out for me. Had knocked me upside the head, stripped off my metalminds, and had me over her shoulder all in an eyeblink. Drug me up here after, real quiet-like. You get her?”

“No,” Wax said, working on Wayne’s bonds. “She ran off.”

Gunshots sounded outside.

“And you ain’t chasin’ her down?”

“Had to check on you first.”

“I’m fine,” Wayne said. “Stop untying me and look in my pocket.”

Wax felt at Wayne’s pocket, pulling out a small pouch.

“From Ranette,” Wayne said.

Wax removed a single bullet cartridge. He held it up as a tense set of constables, led by Marasi, piled into the room.

The newcomers called for an explanation. Wax left them to interrogate Wayne, instead seeking the mists once more.

23

Wax was a bullet in the night, rushing through the mists and disturbing them with his passing. He had become the hunter rather than the game, though the transition might have taken too long. He soared upward first to get a view of the area. An ever-growing crowd surrounded the governor's mansion. Roaring. Calling for change, or perhaps just blood.

Would he bring down Bleeder only to find her victorious in a city destroyed?

He couldn't worry about that at the moment. Instead he sought signs, clues, a story. Nobody passed, even at night, without leaving a trail. Perhaps it would be too faint for him to locate, but it would exist.

There. A group of people pulling *away* from the mansion, instead of crowding toward it. Wax landed in a storm, mistcoat flaring. This was the mansion's garden, near a large workers' shed. Wax studied the pattern of people moving away.

The gunfire just a moment ago, he thought. *It wasn't to shoot someone, but to clear the crowd.* She was out of Feruchemical speed and fleeing frantically, and had opened fire into the air to clear this pocket of people. As he listened he picked out cries of confusion, some people claiming the constables had opened fire on the crowd. Others claimed they'd seen the governor himself running, trying to escape the mansion.

Wax loaded Vindication with the single bullet Ranette had sent, placing it in one of the special chambers he could quickly spin to at will. Then he inched open the door to the shed, crouching beside the doorway so as to not present a profile. The mists were bright with torchlight this night, but that light didn't penetrate to the dark shed. Wax searched through the shadows, until he saw something.

A bone? Yes, and draped over it cloth. He picked out a fallen cravat, a white buttoning shirt … the governor's clothing. Bleeder had stashed another body in here, and had fled to swap into it. How fast was she? MeLaan had said that Bleeder could change faster than she could, but that nobody was as quick as TenSoon.

That didn't tell him much. MeLaan had taken minutes, TenSoon seconds. Wax held Vindication beside his head and slipped through the doorway. If he could find Bleeder in midtransformation …

"I can still free you," a voice whispered from the darkness inside. "Perhaps I have lost the city, but I didn't come here for them. Not at first. I came for you."

"Why me?" Wax asked, searching furiously through the darkness, palm sweating as he held Vindication. "Damn it, creature, *why me*?"

"I have deafened him," Bleeder whispered. "I have cut out his tongue, pierced his eyes, but still he can act. You are his hands, Waxillium Ladrian. He may be deaf, blind, and mute … but still, with you, he can move his pawns."

"I'm my own man, Bleeder," Wax said, finally spotting what he thought was her silhouette, crouched at the back of the dusty chamber, beside a rack of shovels. "Perhaps I serve Harmony, but I do so because I wish it."

"Ah," she whispered. "Do you know, Wax, how long he cultivated you? How long he teased you, led you by the nose? How he sent you to be hardened by the Roughs, so he could draw you back in once you had aged properly, like leather being cured.…"

Wax raised Vindication, but the side of the building burst outward, showering pieces of wood across the lawn. Wax tried to draw a bead on her, but didn't fire, and Bleeder ducked out. He had to be very careful with this shot. Ranette had sent but one bullet, and only it would matter in this fight.

Bleeder fled into the night and launched into the air. The breaking wall had been an indication, but this was confirmation. Her metalmind, drained of the speed she'd stored up, was now useless. She'd left it on the ground beside the governor's bones, and had become a Coinshot instead.

Wax followed, Pushing on the same nails, sending himself into the sky. He could see why she'd chosen to become a Coinshot; Steelpushing lent great maneuverability and speed, and logically gave her the best chance of escaping.

There was a problem with that, of course.

Steel was *his* domain.

* * *

The pile of bones on the floor of the little shack proved that at least one person was having a worse night than Wayne was. He nudged the pile with his toe, then grimaced at his wounded leg. Rusting inconvenient, that was. He had to grab the wall for support.

He looked toward Marasi. "I can't decide," he said, "if the governor already bein' dead means we did a really terrible job, or a really good one."

"How," Marasi replied, kneeling beside the corpse, "could you see this as anything *other* than terrible?"

"Well, see, we weren't the ones what was in charge of keepin' him alive when he died." Wayne shrugged. "Guess anytime I find a corpse and it ain't *my* fault they're dead, I feel a little relieved."

MeLaan strolled into the cottage, still wearing the body of the guardswoman—though she had moved back to speaking with her own voice now. "It's getting rough out there. We'll want to get back into the mansion soon."

Marasi continued to kneel by the bones, which were lit by Wayne's lantern. His wrists still chafed from his confinement, and his leg smarted something fierce. Rusting kandra. She'd known just how to take him out: a quick burst of speed, tie his legs together, gag him, steal his metalminds—even though it didn't matter none how quickly he could heal if he was tied up.

Course, she should have checked his hands for gum as she towed him into the room.

"The governor is dead," Marasi whispered.

"Yeah," Wayne said, "havin' your skeleton removed tends to do that to a guy."

"What does it mean?" Marasi said, looking out the side of the shack, in the direction they'd seen Wax escape.

"Well, it means he won't be makin' it to his tap-dancing lessons this—"

"Wayne?"

"Yeah?"

"Shut it."

"Yes, ma'am."

Marasi closed her eyes, and Wayne leaned back against the wall, looking out at that crowd. Angry, waiting for the governor to give them his speech. The speech that was supposed to stop all this.

"Bleeder was planning to outrage them," MeLaan said. "I heard some of his speech. Maybe we can make them disperse?"

"No," Marasi said, standing. "We can do better than that." She turned to MeLaan, then nudged the governor's skull with her foot. "How long will it take you to imitate him?"

"I didn't digest his corpse—and don't wince like that, it's not my fault you people happen to be edible. If it helps, you taste terrible, even if you're properly aged. Anyway, it will be tough. TenSoon's pretty good at re-creating a face from a skull, but I'm way less practiced."

Wayne didn't say anything. He could shut it. Damn right he could shut it, when he needed to. Even if there was jokes that practically *begged* to be said.

"You have us to help you get it right," Marasi said to MeLaan. "Plus, it will be dark. You won't need to fool Innate's mother, just a crowd of angry citizens, most of whom haven't seen him up close."

MeLaan folded her arms, inspecting the remains. "Fine. If you think you can come up with something for me to say that will placate that crowd, I'll do it."

Wayne stood still, jaw clenched. *No jokes about … well, the obvious things.* Besides, he'd just learned something far worse. Something that was *no* cause for laughter.

Marasi looked at him, then frowned. "Wayne, what's wrong?"

He sat down, shaking his head.

"Wayne?" Marasi said, rising, sounding genuinely concerned. "I didn't mean to snap at you. It's just that—"

“I don’t mind what you said,” Wayne said.

“Then what?”

“Well,” he said, looking at MeLaan, “I’d just always assumed … you know … that humans tasted *wonderful*.”

“Nope,” MeLaan said.

“You’re really woundin’ my self-esteem,” Wayne said. “Maybe I’m different. Wanna gnaw on my arm a bit? It’ll grow right back, least once we find out what that monster did with my metalminds.…”

Marasi sighed loudly. “MeLaan, work on those bones. I need to rewrite your speech.…”

24

Bleeder had obviously practiced with steel. She knew how to Push on passing latches or lampposts to adjust her course. She knew how to drop low before shoving on a parked motorcar to give herself lateral speed, rather than just Pushing herself higher. She was capable.

Wax was more than capable. He followed as a shadow, never more than a half leap behind her. He sensed an increasingly frantic quality to her motions, flared steel trying to Push herself out of his reach.

He let her, at first, trying to run her out of steel. They bounced through the city, two currents in the mist, leaping over roadways clogged with angry rioters, past middle-class neighborhoods full of closed shutters and extinguished lights, over the grounds of the rich—whose security forces stood tensely by gates, waiting for this hellish night to end.

Wax confirmed to himself as they flew that Bleeder had not been the Marksman. She'd worn one of his masks earlier—and seemed to be doing so again, from the quick glance he got as she passed a burning building in the night—but she did so to consternate and confuse him. Marks had sought the insides of rooms as he ran, trying to set up an ambush. She kept to the open spaces, as if frightened of the indoors. No running toward skyscrapers, no seeking the cramped confines of the slums. Instead, she headed directly east from the governor’s mansion, toward the freedom of the outer city.

There wouldn’t be nearly so much metal out there, making it difficult for her to flee—but also removing some of his advantage. He couldn’t let that happen.

As they chased past a late train, Wax redoubled his efforts. He anticipated her turn as she cut away from the train toward an industrial quarter, and he cut sideways, earning a few seconds. As she leaped over a squat, burning building—passing protesters who threw rocks at her from below—Wax skimmed between it and the building beside it, coming around the other side in a precise turn. He passed through boiling smoke and emerged, gun out, as she came down from a more graceful arc.

That earned a curse from her as she saw him. She flung herself down a street, using each passing light as another source to Push off, increasing her speed. It was done with deftness, but Wax had an advantage. He decreased his weight, filling his metalmind. As always, though the change was sometimes subtle, this increased his velocity. If he decreased his weight while in motion, he got a little burst of speed. He didn’t know why.

In a chase such as this, shoving off each light that passed, little advantages like that added up. Each cut corner, each careful judge of an arc, each use of the speed boost in flight after landing for a moment, sent him closer to her. To the point that as they neared the edge of the city, she glanced backward and found him about to grab her heels.

She cried out, a feminine exclamation of surprise. She shoved herself to the side, passing out over the river, and managed to land on the roadway portion of the Eastbridge, holding on to one of the support wires.

Wax landed gracefully before her, gun out. “You can’t run from me, Bleeder. Let me remove your spike and take you prisoner. Perhaps the others can find a way, someday, to heal your madness.”

“And become a slave again,” she whispered behind the red and white mask. “Would you clasp the manacles willingly on your own hands?”

“If I had done the horrible things that you have, then yes. I would demand to be taken in.”

“And what of the god you serve? When will Harmony accept *his* punishments? The people he lets die. The people he *makes* die.”

Wax raised his gun, but Bleeder launched herself upward.

Wax trailed her with his weapon, but she bounced back and forth between massive bridge support beams, and he did not fire. Instead he lifted himself with a Push, soaring up—coat flapping—until he reached the top of one of the bridge's suspension towers. Bleeder waited here, atop the pinnacle, dressed in her red shirt and trousers, a loose cape blowing around her.

Wax landed and leveled the gun.

Bleeder dropped the mask.

She wore Lessie's face.

* * *

Marasi didn't tell the other constables, even Aradel, the truth about Innate. What would she have said? "Sorry, but the man we've been protecting was actually the killer"? "Oh, and the city has been *run* by an insane kandra for who knows how long"? She'd make a report soon, once she knew how to explain it, but for now she didn't have time. She needed to save the city.

She still felt a stab of guilt as she stood near the flimsy stage at the front of the steps, where she watched Captain Aradel pass her. The lord high constable looked visibly sick as he paced. The predicament she'd placed him in, with regards to thinking the governor was a crook, troubled him deeply.

Nearby, MeLaan stepped up onto the stage to address the crowd. Though she critiqued her own shortcomings, in Marasi's estimation her imitation of the governor was excellent.

The crowd grew quiet. Marasi frowned. Had Aradel's men prompted that somehow? No … the constables stood in a tight line between the crowd and the mansion, but weren't doing anything to quell the crowd.

How odd. Though there were a few jeers, for the most part everyone fell silent—watching through the mists, which seemed thinner than they had before, now that lights had been set up all around the square in front of the mansion. The former rioters genuinely wanted to hear what the governor had to say. Well, why *shouldn't* they?

Marasi felt their mood, one of hostile curiosity. She felt a calmness too. MeLaan's speech would work. Everything was fine. Why had she been so worried earlier? It …

Rusts. She was being Soothed.

She snapped alert, suddenly tense. She knew crowds. She'd studied mob dynamics. It was her specialty—and she could tell, easily, that something was wrong here. But who was Soothing? Why? How?

Suit, she thought. Waxillium had said the Set was involved. His uncle had access to Allomancers, and an inclination to see that Bleeder's plans came to fruition. It didn't matter what Marasi had written for MeLaan to say; when Suit's men discovered that "the governor" was deviating from the script, they'd drive the crowd to a frenzy.

Suddenly frantic, Marasi didn't listen to the beginning of MeLaan's speech. Could she get to Aradel? No, he was standing on the rusting stage, near MeLaan. Wayne, putting on a brave face despite his wound, hovered near the two of them, ready to help if something went wrong.

Marasi had to move quickly, and quietly, not alerting the Set. She spotted Reddi standing near the base of the steps, watching the crowd with arms folded. Marasi scrambled over to him and seized his arm.

"Reddi," she said. "There's a Soother in this crowd somewhere."

"What?" he asked absently, glancing at her. "Hmm?"

"A Soother," Marasi said. "Dampening our emotions. Probably a Rioter waiting too, to drive the crowd into a frenzy once they hear the speech."

"Don't be silly," Reddi said with a yawn. "Everything is fine, Lieutenant."

"Reddi," she said, tightening her grip. "How do you feel?"

"Fine."

"Not annoyed at me?" she said. "Not angry that I hold the position you should? Not jealous at all?"

He glared at her, then cocked his head. Then he hissed out softly. "Damn it, you're right. I usually *hate* you, but all I feel is a mild dislike. Someone's playing with my emotions." He hesitated. "No offense."

"Can't feel offense," Marasi said. "I'm having trouble feeling any strong emotion or urgency. But Reddi, we *have* to stop them."

"I'll get a squad," he said. "How will we find them though? They could be anywhere."

"No," Marasi said, scanning the crowd. Her eyes found a carriage parked discreetly in a small alleyway across from the governor's square. "Not anywhere. They won't want to mix with the masses that they're planning to turn into a murderous mob. Too dangerous. Come on."

25

Upon seeing Lessie's face, Wax growled in a guttural, primal sound. The sound of a man getting hit straight in the stomach with a well-driven punch. He held the gun on Bleeder, but his hand wavered, and his vision shook.

It's not her. It's not her.

"Again with the guns," Bleeder said softly. Rusts! It was Lessie's voice. "You lean on them too much, Wax. You're a Coinshot. How often do I have to point that out?"

"You dug up her corpse?" Wax asked in a pleading voice. He was having trouble seeing straight. "You monster. You *dug up her corpse*?"

"I wish I hadn't been forced to do this," Les—*Bleeder* said. "But strong emotion frees us from him, Wax. It's the only way."

She stared down that gun. Of course she would. She was a kandra. He had to remind himself of that forcibly. The gun meant nothing to her.

Lessie … How often had he dreamed of hearing that voice again? He'd wept for the wish to tell her one last time of his love. To explain the hole, gaping like the wound from a shotgun blast, left in him by her death.

To apologize.

Harmony. I can't shoot her again.

Bleeder had outthought him after all.

"I worried about using Tan's body," Lessie said, stepping toward him. "Worried it would make you figure out who I really was."

"You're *not* Lessie."

She grimaced. "Yeah, I guess that's true. I was never Lessie. Always Paalm the kandra. But I *wanted* to be Lessie. Does that count for anything?"

Rusts … she had Lessie's mannerisms down exactly. MeLaan had said she was good, but this was so real, so *believable*. He found himself lowering his gun, wishing. Wishing …

Harmony? he begged.

But he didn't have his earring in.

* * *

Marasi and Reddi wrapped around, moving over a block before coming back in behind the suspicious carriage. They hadn't been able to gather as large a force as she'd wanted—not only did they worry about the Soother noticing the motion, Reddi was concerned about leaving too few people watching the crowd.

MeLaan's voice carried through the voice projectors, audible even as Marasi and her team of eleven men set up near the far end of the alleyway containing the carriage. How long before the Set noticed they'd been had? Probably not long. Marasi had left in some of the beginning part of the speech, in order to not sound *too* different from Innate, but the speech would take a turn very soon.

Reddi pulled off his constable's helmet—Marasi's own pressed against her hair, an uncomfortable weight—then nodded to the rest of them in the darkness. With his aluminum-lined helmet off, he could feel the Soother's touch more powerfully here than he had out in the crowd. That carriage really was the source of it.

He put the helmet back on. The precinct owned only a dozen of these, all donated by Waxillium. Reddi had just enough clout to requisition the task force that had them. He secured his helmet, then reached to his side, taking out a thick dueling cane like a long baton with a knob on the end. The others did the same. There would be no gunplay this close to a crowd of civilians.

"We go in quickly and quietly," Reddi whispered to the team. "Hope to Harmony they don't have a Coinshot with them. Keep your helmets on. I don’t want that Soother taking control of any of you.”

Marasi cocked an eyebrow. Soothers couldn’t control people, though many mistook that. It didn’t help that the Words of Founding spoke vaguely of kandra and koloss being controlled by Allomancy, but Marasi now knew that was only possible for someone who bore Hemalurgic spikes.

“Colms,” Reddi said, still speaking in a low voice, “stay at the back. You’re not a field agent. I don’t want you getting hurt or, worse, messing this up.”

“As you wish,” she said.

Reddi counted softly. On ten, the group of them surged into the misted alleyway. Marasi hung near the back, walking with hands clasped behind her. Almost immediately after entering the alleyway, the constables pulled to a stop. A force of men in dark clothing piled out of a doorway inside the alley, blocking off access to the little carriage.

Marasi’s heart pounded as the two groups regarded one another. At least this proved she’d been right about the carriage. A few of the newcomers carried guns, but a barked word from one of the dark-clothed men made them tuck those away.

They don’t want to draw the crowd’s attention from the speech, Marasi thought. *They still think what the governor is saying plays into their plans.*

Keeping this fight quiet would serve both sides. The two groups stood waiting, tense, before Reddi waved his dueling cane.

The two forces crashed into one another.

* * *

Bleeder stepped closer to Wax in the mists. Atop this high platform, this tower on the bridge, nothing else seemed to exist. It was as if they stood on a tiny steel island rising from the sea. Grey all around, darkness extending into vastness above.

“Maybe I should have come to you,” Lessie’s voice said. “And had you help me with my plan. But he was watching. He’s *always* watching. I’m glad you took the earring out. At least my words meant something to you.”

“Stop,” Wax whispered. “Please.”

“Stop what?” Lessie asked, mere inches from him. “Stop walking? Stop talking? Stop loving you? My life would have been a lot easier if I’d been able to do *that*.”

Wax seized her with his open hand, grabbing her by the neck, thumb along her jaw. She met his eyes, and he saw pity in them.

"Perhaps," she said, "the reason I didn't come to you had no connection to Harmony at all. I knew this would hurt you. I'm sorry."

No, Wax thought.

"I'm going to have to do something about you," she said. "Keep you safe, somehow, but out of the way. Might have to hurt you, Wax. For your own good."

No, this isn't real.

"Still don't know what to do about Wayne," she said. "Couldn't bring myself to kill him, poor fool. He followed you here, to help you in the city. For that I love him. But he's still Harmony's, and so he's probably better dead than the way he is now."

NO!

Wax shoved her back, lifting Vindication again. The gun, however, leaped from his fingers—Pushed by Bleeder. It tumbled into the mists.

Wax growled, ramming his shoulder into Bleeder, trying to toss her off the tower. She seized him as he hit, throwing them both off balance.

As they fell together, she raised her aluminum gun and shot him in the leg.

He cried out as they fell from the tower, dropping through the mists. A frantic Push on the bridge below slowed Wax, but when he hit, his leg gave out and he screamed, dropping to one knee.

Gun. Find the gun.

It had fallen this way. Rusts. Would it even work after dropping so far? He hadn't heard it hit. Did that mean it had plunged into the waters?

Bleeder landed hard nearby. She spun on him, lit now by the garish electric lights that lined the roadway of the bridge. It was empty of carriages and motorcars, and behind her, a greater light hovered over the city. Red, violent light, seeming to burn the mists.

Looking out of the city, he saw darkness and peace. But inward, Elendel burned.

* * *

Marasi edged along the outside of a battlefield.

It was a very *small* battlefield, true, but the ferocity of the conflict stunned her. She felt she could—for the first time—imagine what it had been like to live during the War of Ash, so long ago.

But surely wars back then had been more thought-out, more deliberate. Not this mixed jumble of figures beating on one another, breaking bones, cursing, stepping on the fallen. Watching it made her sick, anxious. Those men were her colleagues, struggling frantically to push through the Set's thugs. All night they'd been forced to stand and watch the city decompose around them, the situation growing worse and worse as they felt helpless.

This was something they could fight, so fight they did, cracking heads, shoving down enemies, grunting in the dirty, dark alleyway in an effort to reach the carriage. Thankfully, the Set troops here didn't appear to include any Coinshots or Pewterarms.

Her men were still outnumbered, and for all their determination they weren't making much headway. Outside the alleyway, the crowd was growing restless. The kandra's speech turned toward the words Marasi had written for her, words promising social reform, legislation to cut down work hours and improve conditions in the factories. What Marasi was able to hear of the echoing voice, unfortunately, had a sense of desperation to it. It sounded fake, inauthentic.

That wasn't MeLaan's fault. She had said she didn't have time to prepare this imitation properly, and it wasn't her specialty in the first place. Rusts. The crowd started to shout, cursing the governor's lies. MeLaan's voice faltered. Was this the Rioter, whipping the crowd into a frenzy? Or were the people so angry, they were overcoming the Allomancy?

Either way, Marasi couldn't help feeling desperate as her men struggled and fell, the crowd building toward a full-on riot. She made her way along the side of the alley, hoping that if she got to that carriage she could make a difference. Unfortunately, the alley's confines were too narrow, and combatants filled the entire thing. Already half her men were down. Those who fought looked like wraiths, shifting and undulating in the mists. Shadows trying to consume shadows.

Nobody on either side seemed to pay her much attention. That was common. For most of her life, her father had wished that she would vanish. Those in high society were very good at pretending she didn't exist. Even Waxillium seemed to forget she was along sometimes.

Well, so be it. She took a deep breath, and strode directly into the fight. As she neared two struggling men, she dodged in, as if trying to do something to help—then flung herself to the side as if she'd been hit. It was a fair impression, in her opinion.

She heard Reddi curse her name from somewhere in the alleyway, but nobody came to her rescue. They kept trying very assiduously to kill one another, and so Marasi crept along the ground, crawling in the shadows until she neared the carriage.

Two guards stood here. Drat. She needed to get past them. How?

She glanced back toward the fight. It had moved farther up the alley, the constables being forced to retreat before superior numbers. They were probably far enough away that Marasi could try something truly desperate.

She used her Allomancy.

For a brief moment, she engaged a speed bubble that caught herself and just the two guards. She extinguished her metal immediately. Only seconds had passed outside.

It was still jarring. The mists seemed to zip with sudden speed around them, and the combatants lurched in their motions. The two guards jumped in surprise, looking around. Marasi did her best impression of a corpse.

Then she flicked on the Allomancy again.

"Ruin!" one of the guards said. "You see that?"

"There's Metalborn among them," the other said. They both sounded very nervous.

Marasi gave them another jolt of distorted time. The two guards held a hushed, frantic argument; then they knocked on the door of the carriage and spoke through the window. Marasi waited, sweating, her nerves taut. Her men didn't have much time.…

The two guards ran down the alleyway, leaving the carriage and carrying orders to the other combatants to be wary of Metalborn. Marasi got to her feet and slipped around to the other side of the carriage, which had no driver, then pulled open the door and slipped inside, seating herself.

A pudgy woman sat on the bench within, wearing a lavish gown of three silken layers. A man beside her sat with a hand on her wrist, his eyes closed, his suit very stylish and modern. The handgun Marasi leveled at them was, on the other hand, quite traditional. And quite functional.

The woman blinked, breaking her concentration to regard Marasi with a look of horror. She nudged the man, who opened his eyes, startled. One Soother and one Rioter, Marasi would guess.

"I have a theory," Marasi said to them, "that a gentlewoman should never need to resort to something so barbarous as violence to achieve her goals. Wouldn't you agree?"

The two quickly nodded.

"Yes indeed," Marasi said. "A true gentlewoman uses the *threat* of violence instead. So much more civilized." She cocked the gun. "Stop those pewterheads in the alley from beating up my friends. Then we'll talk about what to do with this crowd.…"

* * *

"Stop it, Wax!" Bleeder screamed. "Stop obeying him!"

There. Vindication! He spotted the gun near Bleeder, peeking out of a gutter alongside the roadway.

Wax leaped for it, rolling painfully on his wounded arm, using a Push to skid forward. Bleeder leveled her gun at him, but didn't fire. Perhaps, deep down, a part of the creature had adopted the feelings of the body it wore. Perhaps it no longer could tell the difference between its mind and its face.

Wax snatched up Vindication.

"Please," Bleeder whispered. "Listen."

"You're wrong about me," Wax said, spinning the chamber, feeling the trigger, hoping the gun still worked. He looked up at Bleeder and leveled the weapon.

Looking down those sights, he saw Lessie. His stomach turned again.

"How am I wrong?" Bleeder asked.

Rusts, she was crying.

"I'm not Harmony's hands," Wax whispered. "I'm His sword."

Then he fired.

Bleeder didn't dodge. Why would she? Guns barely inconvenienced her. This shot took her right in the forehead. Though her head flinched at the impact, she didn't fall, barely even moved.

She stared at him, a little dribble of blood running down beside the bridge of her nose, onto her lips. Then her eyes widened.

Her gun dropped from trembling fingers.

We're weaker than other Hemalurgic creatures, MeLaan had said. Wax struggled to his feet, holding on to the bridge's side wall for support. *Only two spikes, and we can be taken.*

"No!" Bleeder screeched, falling to her knees. "*No!*"

One spike allowed her to be sapient. And a second—delivered into her skull in the form of a bullet forged from Wax's earring—let Harmony seize control of her again.

26

Marasi towed the female Soother after her, holding the woman’s collar with one hand, her gun in the other. They were accompanied by a battered Reddi, who regarded the surging crowd with displeasure. They’d left the other captives with the rest of the constables, and she prayed to Harmony that wasn’t tempting fate.

“Stop them,” Marasi hissed at the woman as they reached the edge of the crowd, which was throwing things at the stage. Poor MeLaan soldiered onward with the speech, growing more and more testy that they weren’t listening.

“I’m trying!” the Soother complained. “It might be easier if you weren’t *choking* me!”

“Just Soothe!” Reddi said, raising his dueling cane.

“I can’t control their minds, silly man!” the Soother said. “And beating on me won’t accomplish anything. When do I get to speak to my solicitor? I’ve broken no laws. I was simply watching the proceedings with interest.”

Marasi ignored Reddi’s angry response, instead focusing on the crowd. MeLaan stood before them, lit by electric lights from behind, but by bonfires from the front. The rage of the crowd, an ancient fire, against the cold sterility of the new world.

"You should be grateful!" MeLaan shouted at the crowd. "I've come to talk to you myself!"

Wrong words, Marasi thought. Her annoyance was leading her to deviate from the script.

"I'm listening!" MeLaan yelled over the crowd. "But you have to listen back, you miscreants!"

She sounds just like him. Too much, perhaps? MeLaan was playing a *part*. She was the governor, the role Marasi had given her. It seemed that the kandra had let the form dictate her reactions. Rusts … it wasn't that she was doing a bad job. She was doing a good job—of being Innate. Unfortunately, Innate had always had trouble connecting with the crowds.

"Fine," MeLaan said, waving a hand. "Burn the city! See how you feel in the morning without homes to live in."

Marasi closed her eyes and groaned. Rusts, she was tired. How late was it, now?

The crowd was growing violent. Time to grab MeLaan and Wayne and leave. Their gambit had failed. It had been a long shot in the first place, perhaps impossible. This crowd had come for blood. And …

The crowd shouted a new set of jeers. Marasi frowned, opening her eyes. She stood at the south edge of the crowd, near one of the bonfires, and was close enough to the front to make out Constable-General Aradel, who had stepped up beside MeLaan. Likely, he was going to get "the governor" to safety.

Instead Aradel took out his pistol and *pointed it at the governor*.

Marasi gaped for a moment. Then she spun on the Soother. "Soothe them!" she said. "Now. With everything you have. Do it, and I give you immunity for what you did tonight."

The woman eyed Marasi, displaying a craftiness that belied her earlier whining. She seemed to be weighing the offer.

"I promise it," Marasi said, "by the Survivor's spear."

The woman nodded, and a wave went through the crowd—a sudden hush. It didn't quiet them completely, but when Aradel spoke, his voice carried.

"Replar Innate," Aradel said. "In the name of the people of this city, and by the authority of my station as lord high constable, I arrest you for gross corruption, personal exploitation of this city’s resources, and perjury of your oaths as a civil servant.”

The crowd finally stilled completely.

“What idiocy—” MeLaan began.

“Men, turn around,” Aradel said. He looked down at his constables. “Turn *around*.”

The feeble line of soldiers reluctantly turned to face him, putting their backs to the crowd.

“What is he *doing*?” Reddi demanded.

“Something brilliant,” Marasi said.

Aradel looked over the crowd, still holding a gun to the governor. “Tonight, the governor himself declared this city to be in a state of martial law. That puts the constables in charge, with him at the head. Unfortunately, it turns out the governor is a lying bastard.”

Some of the people began hesitant shouts of agreement.

“He’s no longer in control,” Aradel said. “Best I can figure, *you’re* in control. So if you’re willing, tonight, the constables stand with you.

“Now, you all came here to start a riot. Listen! Stop your shouts. I won’t stand for rioting or looting. You start burning this city, and I’ll fight you up to my last breath. You hear me? We *aren’t a mob*.”

“Then what are we?” a call went up, along with a handful of others.

“We’re the people of Elendel, and we’re tired of being led by a pack of rats,” Aradel yelled. “I have proof of at least seven house lords who are corrupt. I mean to see them arrested. Tonight.” Aradel hesitated, then spoke louder, voice carrying and amplified by the cones set up before the stage. “I could use an army to help me, if you’re willing.”

As the crowd roared its agreement, Aradel shoved MeLaan into the hands of a pair of corporals waiting nearby. They seemed utterly stunned. In truth, Aradel himself seemed a little overwhelmed by what he’d just done.

“Pure Preservation,” Reddi cursed softly, looking over the excited crowd. “They’re going to turn into a lynch mob.”

“No,” Marasi said. “They won’t.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Because a river is easier to channel than to stop, Reddi,” Marasi said.

This could work. She didn’t have much hope for holding the house lords and ladies Aradel wanted to arrest, but the governor himself … With those letters and MeLaan playing the role … Yes, this could *really work*.

She released the Soother. “You’re free; get out of here. And tell Suit he might want to take an extended vacation during what is coming.”

* * *

Wax crossed the bridge limping. Life had taught him never to underestimate an enemy you thought you’d downed. One hand on his bleeding leg, he kept his gun trained on the writhing figure until he could sweep her gun away. Then he went down on his good knee and rolled her over, making certain she wasn’t covering up another weapon.

He found tears streaming from her eyes, mixing with the trickling blood from the bullet wound. “He’s in my head again, Wax,” she whispered, trembling. “Oh, *Ruin,* he’s in my head. He’s taking me. I won’t go back to him.”

“Hush,” Wax said, pulling a second gun from her side and tossing it away. “It’s all right.”

“No,” she cried, grabbing his arm. “No, it’s not. I won’t be his again! I *will be me,* at the end!”

Bleeder’s trembling increased, her body bucking, as she held to his arm. He frowned as she kept her head thrust forward, meeting his eyes, weeping and shuddering. Thrashing.

“What are you doing?” Wax demanded.

“Dying. We decided it! We won’t fall again. We found a way out.” She could no longer meet his eyes, and she fell backward, spasming. Eyes dilating quickly, skin trembling against the bone.

Wax watched, horrified. He seized her arm. No pulse. She *was* dying. Killing herself.

Could he stop it?

Why would he care to? She was a murderer many times over. This was a fitting end. In truth, he empathized with her. Let her take this route, rather than suffering under Harmony’s control. Hesitant, but feeling there was little else he could do for this poor creature, he picked her up and held her close. Let her die in someone’s arms. It revolted him to do so, after what she had done. But damn it, it was *right.*

Bleeder turned her head toward him, and her expression softened as she shook, smiling through bloodied lips. “You’re … you’re as surprising as a … dancing donkey, Mister Cravat.”

Wax grew cold. “Where did you hear that? How did you know those words?”

“I think I loved you even on that day,” she said. “Lawman for hire. So ridiculous, but so … earnest. You didn’t try to shelter me, but seemed so eager to impress.… A lord with a purpose.”

“Who told you of that day, Bleeder?” Wax demanded. “Who…”

“Ask Harmony,” she said, the trembling growing more violent. “Ask him, Wax! Ask why he sent a kandra to watch over you, all those years ago. *Ask him* if he knew I would come to love you!”

“No…”

“He moved us, even then!” she whispered. “I refused. I wouldn’t manipulate you into returning to Elendel! You loved it out there. I wouldn’t bring you back, to become his pawn.…”

“Lessie?” Harmony, it *was* her.

It was *her*.

“Ask him … Wax,” she said. “Ask him … why … if he knows everything … he’d let you kill me.…” She grew still.

“Lessie?” Wax said. “Lessie!”

She was gone. There in his lap, he stared at her body. It kept its shape. Her shape. He clutched her, and let out a low-pitched howl, from deep within, a raw shout that echoed into the night.

It seemed to drive the mists back.

He still knelt there, holding the body, an hour later when a figure loped out of the mists and approached on four legs. TenSoon the kandra, Guardian of the Ascendant Warrior, approached with a reverent step, wolfhound’s head bowed.

Wax stared out into those shifting mists, holding a corpse, hoping irrationally that his heat would keep it warm.

“Tell me,” Wax said, voice cracking and rough from his shouting. “*Tell me,* kandra.”

“She was sent to you long ago,” TenSoon said, sitting back on his haunches. “The woman you knew as Lessie was always one of us.”

No …

“Harmony worried about you in the Roughs, lawman,” TenSoon said. “He wanted you to have a bodyguard. Paalm had exhibited a willingness to break prohibitions the rest of us held sacred. He hoped that you two would be good for one another.”

“You didn’t tell me?” Wax spat, his grip tight. Hatred. He didn’t think he had ever felt *hatred* so intense as he did at that moment.

“I was forbidden,” TenSoon said. “MeLaan didn’t know; I was only informed a few days ago. Harmony foresaw a disaster if you were told whom you hunted.”

“And this *isn’t* a disaster, kandra?”

TenSoon turned away. They sat there on that empty bridge, electric lights making pockets in the mist, a dead woman in Wax’s lap.

“I killed her,” Wax whispered, squeezing his eyes closed. “I killed her *again*.”

EPILOGUE

Wax sat alone in a room full of people. They’d done everything to make him comfortable. A warm fire on the hearth, a small lamp on the table beside it, for Steris knew he preferred flame to electricity. Broadsheets lay untouched in a roll beside a cup of tea that had long since grown cold.

They talked and celebrated, led by Lord Harms, who laughed and exclaimed about his minor part in it all. A disaster averted. A new governor—the first ever who was not of noble blood. Even the Lord Mistborn, long ago, had been part nobleman. The Last Emperor had been full-blooded, and the Survivor half nobleman. All great people, everyone agreed, to be lauded.

But Claude Aradel had none of the same lineage. Not a drop of noble blood in him. Those at the party congratulated one another for being so progressive as to speak favorably of one who was common-born.

Wax stared into the fire, fingering at the stubble on his chin. He spoke when it was required of him, but mostly they allowed him his peace. He was wrung out, Steris told them. Fatigued by the terrible things he’d seen. She diverted them from him when she could, telling them—when they inevitably asked—that she and he had decided to delay the wedding so Wax could take a short vacation to recuperate.

Partway through the event, Wayne sauntered over on crutches. He couldn't heal without storing up more health—and he couldn't do that while healing from his wound, or it would defeat the purpose. For now, he had to deal with the fragility of the body, just like a normal person.

We're all so fragile, when you consider it, Wax thought. *One little thing goes wrong, and we break.*

"Hey, mate," Wayne said, settling down on the footstool by Wax's feet. "Wanna hear how I'm a rusting genius?"

"Shoot," Wax whispered.

Wayne leaned forward, spread his hands before himself dramatically. "I'm gonna get *everybody* drunk."

The crowd continued its chatter. Mostly constables. Some political allies of Wax's. He'd chosen to do business with the more reputable people in the city, so Aradel's culling of the lords hadn't hit his house. It was considered an enormous political victory.

"See, I got this plan," Wayne said, tapping his head. "People in this town, they got issues. The folks what work in the factories think havin' more time to themselves is gonna fix their woes, but they gotta do something *with* that time. I've got an idea. It'll fix it all."

"Harmony, Wayne," Wax said. "You're not going to poison the city, are you?"

"Nah," Wayne said. "Not their bodies, at least." He grinned. "You watch. This will work. It's gonna be *amazing*." He rose, and stumbled, almost falling. He looked at his leg in surprise, as if he'd forgotten about the wound. Then he shook his head, grabbing his crutch and getting to his feet.

Once standing he hesitated, then leaned down. "It'll pass, mate," he said. "My pa once said to me, 'Son, keep a stiff upper lip.' So if things get bad, you bash your face against a wall till your lip bleeds, and you'll feel better. Works for me. Least I think it does. Can't right remember, on account of too many head wounds."

He grinned. Wax kept staring into the flames. Wayne's face fell.

"She'd have wanted you to stop her, you know," Wayne said softly. "If she'd been able to talk to you, been able to think straight, she'd have demanded you kill her. Just like I'd have wanted it. Just like you'd want the same, if you'd lost your copper. You did what you hadda do, mate. And you did it well."

He made a fist at Wax and nodded, then hobbled off, approaching a short young woman with long golden hair. A teenage girl? Wax didn't recognize her.

"I know you, don't I?" Wayne said. "Daughter of Remmingtel Tarcsel? The guy what invented the incandescent lightbulb?"

The girl's jaw dropped. "You know him?" She seized Wayne by the arms. "You know about my father?"

"Sure do!" Wayne said. "He was robbed, I gotta say. Genius. Word is, you're just as smart. That device you whipped up for making speeches sure is nice."

She regarded Wayne, then leaned in. "That's only the start. They've brought it into their houses. Don't you see? It's all around."

"What?" Wayne said.

"Electricity," the girl said. "And I'm going to be the first to use it."

"Huh," Wayne said. "Need some money?"

"Do I…" She towed Wayne away through the party, aglow, speaking so quickly Wax couldn't pick out the words.

He didn't care to. He just stared at the fire.

The guests were polite enough not to imply that he was ruining the party by his indifference. Clotide passed by, swapping his cold cup of tea out for a warm one. For all Wax cared, this comfortable chair could have been a hard bench. He didn't feel it, or the warmth of the fire, or the joy of the victory.

How could you hear a bee buzzing in the middle of a thunderstorm?

The guests eventually found excuses to leave, their sedate revels accomplished. Some bade farewell to him. Others did not. About halfway through the protracted death of the party, Marasi settled down on his footstool. She wore her constable's uniform. Odd thing to do at a party, though as he thought about it, the men in the constabulary did it all the time.

Marasi took his tea and sipped it, then placed something else onto the table where the cup had been. Wax's eyes flicked toward it. A small spike, long as a finger, made of some silvery metal with dark red spots, like rusted bits.

"That's one of the spikes she was using, Waxillium," Marasi said softly. "MeLaan wanted me to show it to you."

Wax closed his eyes. They thought he wanted to *see* something like that?

“Waxillium,” Marasi said. “We can’t identify the metal. It’s nothing we’ve ever seen before. It certainly wasn’t one of the spikes she started with. That means she removed both, and stuck one like this in instead. Where did she get them? Who gave them to her?”

“I don’t care,” he whispered, opening his eyes.

Marasi grew quiet. “Wax…”

“He sent her to me, Marasi. He sent a *kandra* to *seduce* me.”

“No,” Marasi said, firm. “He sent a bodyguard to watch over you in the Roughs. I spoke to TenSoon. The seduction was her idea. And yours, presumably.”

“Harmony knew,” Wax said hoarsely. “He saw what would happen.”

“Maybe He didn’t.”

“Then what kind of God is He? What *good* is a God like Him, Marasi? Tell me that.”

Marasi fidgeted, then she sighed and took the strange spike back. She dropped something else onto the table as she rose. A small earring, just a stud with the back bent over. “They sent this for you.”

Wax didn’t look at it. He left that earring right where it was, as Marasi made her farewells and stepped out of the party. Others came to him, offered bland encouragement, of the type you might write on a card.

He nodded, but didn’t listen.

* * *

Marasi stopped by the precinct offices on her way home from the party at Ladrian Mansion, intent on retrieving her copy of the Lord Mistborn’s Hemalurgy book, which she’d locked in her drawer. The offices were dark and quiet—a direct contrast to the chaos of a few nights back. Though some constables were out on patrol, most had been given time off. Only those with jail watch would be on duty.

So it surprised her when she found lights on at the back of the main chamber. She walked up and leaned against the doorframe, looking in at Aradel, who had a stack of papers out and was working on them by candlelight.

“I find it hard to believe,” Marasi noted, “that there’s nothing better for the governor to do on his first day in office than equipment-depreciation reports. Not that I mind. You’ve been ignoring those for … how long?”

Aradel’s expression soured. “I’m not governor,” he said. “Not really.”

“The title ‘Interim Governor’ has the word ‘Governor’ in it, sir.”

“They’ll vote someone else into office next month at the proper hearing.”

“Frankly, sir, I doubt that.”

He slapped one page down on the stack, signed and sealed, then sat there staring at it. Finally he ran a hand through his hair. “Oh, Preservation. What have I done? And why the hell didn’t any of you stop me?”

Marasi smiled. “You didn’t exactly give us a chance, sir.”

“I’ll run away,” he said. “I’ll refuse the appointment. I’ll…” He looked up at her, and then sighed. “I can’t be happy in this position, Colms.”

“The ones who are happy in the role, sir, seem to have had their chance. I’m excited to see where it goes from here. You just changed the world.”

“Didn’t mean to.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Marasi said, glancing to the side as someone else moved through the darkened chamber, approaching. Another constable coming in to catch up on work? “Oh no.”

Governor Innate stepped up to the door, holding a belt. “Either of you know how to tie one of these?” the former governor said in MeLaan’s voice.

“You don’t tie a belt, kandra,” Aradel said. “You buckle it.”

“No, no,” MeLaan said, pulling it tight. “I mean, in making a noose. People always talk about guys hanging themselves in their cells, but I’ll be damned if I can figure it out. Hung there for a good ten minutes, and I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t have killed even the most frail mortal. I’ve got it wrong somehow.”

She looked up at the two of them, then frowned at their appalled expressions. “What?”

“*Hang* yourself?” Marasi sputtered, finally finding her voice. “You’re our linchpin witness!”

“You really think,” MeLaan said dryly, “that Harmony would let me sit at trial and testify falsely against people I don’t even know? It would make a mockery of justice, kids.”

“No,” Marasi said. “We have the letters. We know the truth.”

“Do you?” MeLaan asked, pulling the belt tight again. “You know for certain Paalm didn’t forge those letters, or that Innate himself didn’t do it before she took him? You know that those lords and ladies went through with the plans, rather than backing out? You know they weren’t just talking about possibilities?”

“We’ve got good cases, holy immortal,” Aradel said. “Lieutenant Colms has done her research. We’re pretty sure this is all correct.”

“Then convince the judge and jury,” MeLaan said with a shrug. “We don’t do things like this. People have to be able to trust the law; I’m a lot of things, but I’m *not* going to be the one who sets the precedent that the kandra can lie in order to get someone convicted, even if you’re ‘pretty sure’ you’ve got the right evidence.”

Marasi folded her arms, grinding her teeth. Aradel glanced at her, questioning.

“Without her, they’ll wiggle out of it,” Marasi said. “We won’t be able to keep them in jail. They’ll be loose upon the city again.” She sighed. “But … Blast. She’s probably right, sir. I’d have hit on it if I’d thought about it long enough. We can’t falsify evidence, however right our cause.”

He nodded. “We weren’t going to keep them in prison anyway, Colms. They have too much power, even now. They’d find a way to escape conviction, pinning the charges on subordinates.” He sat back in his chair. “They’ll have the governor’s seat again, unless someone does something about it. Damn it. I really have to do this, don’t I?”

“Sorry, sir,” Marasi said.

“Well, at least I can get my desk clear of paperwork first,” he said, leaning forward in determination. “Suggestions for my replacement as constable-general?”

“Reddi,” Marasi said.

“He hates you.”

“Doesn’t make him a bad conner, sir,” Marasi said. “So long as someone keeps an eye on him, as you put it. I can do that. I think he’ll rise to the challenge.”

Aradel nodded, then held up a hand to MeLaan. She tossed him the belt, and he tied it in a loop.

“This part around your neck, holy one,” he said. “Make your skin bruise so it looks right, a V shape. You know how to make someone look like they died of strangling?”

“Yeah,” MeLaan said. “Unfortunately.”

“I’ll come cut you down in fifteen minutes,” Aradel said. “You’ll need to fool the coroner.”

“No problem,” MeLaan said. “I can breathe through a tracheal system instead of lungs. Arrange to have the body cremated, give me a window, and

I'll slip out and leave the bones, which you can burn. Nice and neat."

"Fine," Aradel said, looking sick.

MeLaan bade him farewell, wandering back toward the cells. Marasi joined her after giving Aradel a salute he didn't see.

"How did you get out, anyway?" Marasi asked, catching up to MeLaan.

"Stuck my finger in the lock," MeLaan said, "and melted my skin, shoving a bit in. It's amazing what you can do when you aren't constrained to normal body shapes."

They walked together to the entrance of the jail part of the building. Marasi wasn't going to ask how MeLaan had avoided the guards. Hopefully the two hadn't been hurt.

"Harmony knows, right?" Marasi asked as MeLaan lingered at the door. "If these people are guilty or not?"

"He does."

"So you could simply ask Him if it's just to imprison them. If He says yes, we could go through with it. I'd accept God's word on the matter to satisfy my conscience."

"Still breaks our rules," MeLaan said. "And Harmony probably wouldn't talk."

"Why not?" Marasi said. "You realize what all this has done to Waxillium, right?"

"He'll weather it."

"He shouldn't have to."

"And what would you have Harmony do, *woman*? Give us all the answers? Lead us by the noses, like Paalm swore that He did? Turn us all into pieces on a board for His amusement?"

Marasi stepped back. She'd never heard such a tone from MeLaan.

"Or maybe you want it the other way?" MeLaan snapped. "Leave us alone completely? Not intervene at all?"

"No, I—"

"Can you imagine what it must be like? Knowing that any action you take is going to help some, but hurt others? Save a man's life now, let him spread a disease that kills a child later in his life. Harmony does the best He can—the best *possible,* by the very definition. Yes, He hurt Wax. He hurt him badly. But He put the pain where He knew it could be borne."

Marasi blushed, then—annoyed at herself—dug in her purse and brought out the strange spike. "And this?"

“It’s not a metal we know.”

“That’s what TenSoon said. But Harmony—”

“It’s not a metal *Harmony* knows,” MeLaan said.

Marasi felt a chill. “Then … it’s not His? Not from His form, like the old stories of atium and lerasium?”

“No,” MeLaan said. “It’s from somewhere else. She used these strange spikes to steal attributes, instead of the ones we’re familiar with. Maybe that’s why she could use stolen Allomancy and Feruchemy, when other kandra can’t. Either way, didn’t you wonder why Harmony couldn’t see Bleeder? Couldn’t track her, couldn’t predict her? What could stop a god, Marasi Colms? Any guesses?”

“Another god,” Marasi whispered.

“Congratulations,” MeLaan said, pulling open the door. “You’ve found proof of something that terrifies us. Think on that for a while, before you go around accusing Harmony—or the kandra—of anything. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go try to hang myself properly.”

She slipped away, closing the door behind her.

Another god, Marasi thought, standing in the darkness. Not Harmony, not Ruin, not Preservation.

She looked down at the small spike in her hands, and heard a name from a year ago, spoken by Miles Hundredlives as he died. The name of a god from the old days. Marasi had researched the name halfheartedly, far more distracted by her interaction with Ironeyes.

Now, however, she determined to dig back into the records and find the answers.

Who, or what, was *Trell?*

* * *

The room had probably grown silent long before Wax noticed he was alone. The fire was dying. He should do something about that.

He didn’t.

Steris stepped over and set a new log on, then stirred the embers. So he hadn’t been alone. She set the poker beside the fireplace, then regarded him. He awaited her words.

None came. Instead, she scooted the footstool around until it was beside his chair. She sat down, legs crossed neatly, hands in her lap.

The two of them remained there, not saying a word, though she did eventually rest her hand on top of his. The fire had felt cold to him, the air frozen, but that hand was warm.

Finally, he turned to the side, rested his head on her shoulder, and wept.

ARS ARCANUM

METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER
Iron	Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Weight
Steel	Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Speed
Tin	Increases Senses	Stores Senses
Pewter	Increases Physical Abilities	Stores Physical Strength
Zinc	Riots (Enflames) Emotions	Stores Mental Speed
Brass	Soothes (Dampens) Emotions	Stores Warmth
Copper	Hides Allomantic Pulses	Stores Memories
Bronze	Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses	Stores Wakefulness
Cadmium	Slows Down Time	Stores Breath
Bendalloy	Speeds Up Time	Stores Energy
Gold	Reveals Your Past Self	Stores Health
Electrum	Reveals Your Own Future	Stores Determination
Chromium	Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target	Stores Fortune
Nicrosil	Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target	Stores Investiture
Aluminum	Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves	Stores Identity
Duralumin	Enhances the Next Metal Burned	Stores Connection

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn Aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them, it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer's metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals' power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people's awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that

Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increases the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the "Metallic Arts," though there are other names for them.

Allomancy is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn’t actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn’t much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the “God Metals” locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

Feruchemy is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren’t spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the inbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

Hemalurgy is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world’s rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an “evil” art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great interest to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are great possibilities for its use.

COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One needs look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called “Twinborn.” The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

BRANDON SANDERSON grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. In addition to completing Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time®, he is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn trilogy, *Warbreaker, The Alloy of Law, The Way of Kings*, *Words of Radiance*, *The Rithmatist*, and *Steelheart*. He won the 2013 Hugo Award for *The Emperor's Soul,* a novella set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. For the behind-the-scenes information on all his books visit www.brandonsanderson.com. Or sign up for email updates here.

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SHADOWS OF SELF: A MISTBORN NOVEL

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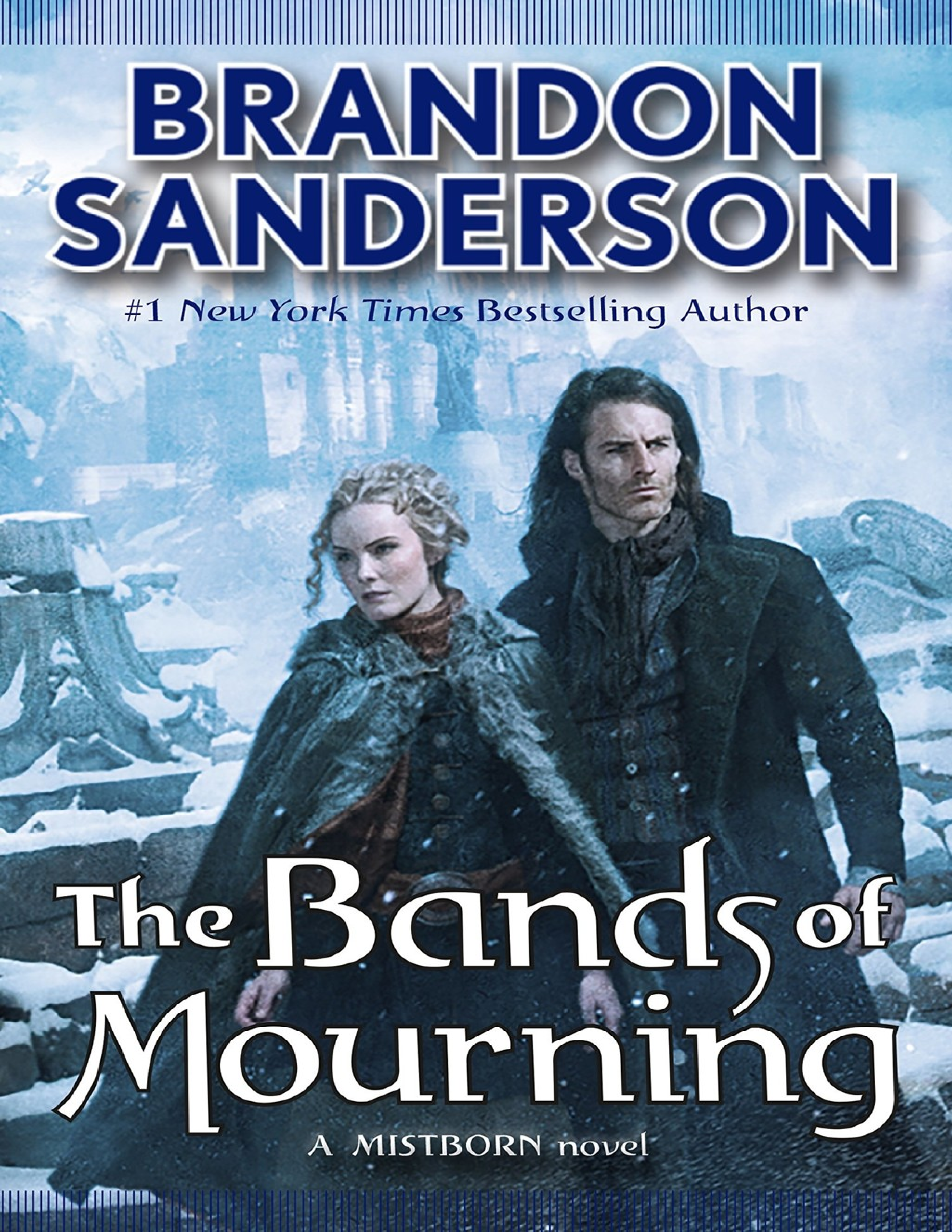

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SANDERSON

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

The Bands of Mourning

A MISTBORN novel

THE BANDS OF MOURNING

A MISTBORN NOVEL

BRANDON SANDERSON

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FOR BEN OLSEN

Who keeps putting up with a bunch of crazy writers as friends,

And finds time to make our books better all the while.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book comes out in the year that will mark the tenth anniversary of the Mistborn series. Considering all the other things I've been doing, it seems like six books in ten years is a grand accomplishment! I can still remember the early months, writing the trilogy furiously, trying to craft something that would really show off what I can do as a writer. Mistborn has become one of my hallmark series, and I hope that you find this volume a worthy entry in the canon.

As always, this book involved the efforts of a great number of people. There's the excellent art by Ben McSweeney and Isaac Stewar†—maps and icons by Isaac, with all the broadsheet art done by Ben. Both also helped a great deal on the text of the broadsheet, and Isaac himself wrote the Nicki Savage piece for it—since the idea was to have Jak hiring out his work now, we wanted to give that a different voice. I think it turned out great!

The cover art was done by Chris McGrath in the US, and by Sam Green for the UK edition. Both are longtime artists on this series, and their art keeps getting better. Editorial was done by Moshe Feder at Tor, with Simon Spanton shepherding the project over at Gollancz in the UK. Agents on the project included Eddie Schneider, Sam Morgan, Krystyna Lopez, Christa Atkinson, and Tae Keller at Jabberwocky in the US, all overseen by the amazing Joshua Bilmes. In the UK you can thank John Berlyne of the Zeno Agency, an all-around awesome guy who worked hard for many years to finally break my books into the UK.

At Tor Books, I'd also like to thank Tom Doherty, Linda Quinton, Marco Palmieri, Karl Gold, Diana Pho, Nathan Weaver, and Rafal Gibek. Copyediting was done by Terry McGarry. The audiobook narrator is

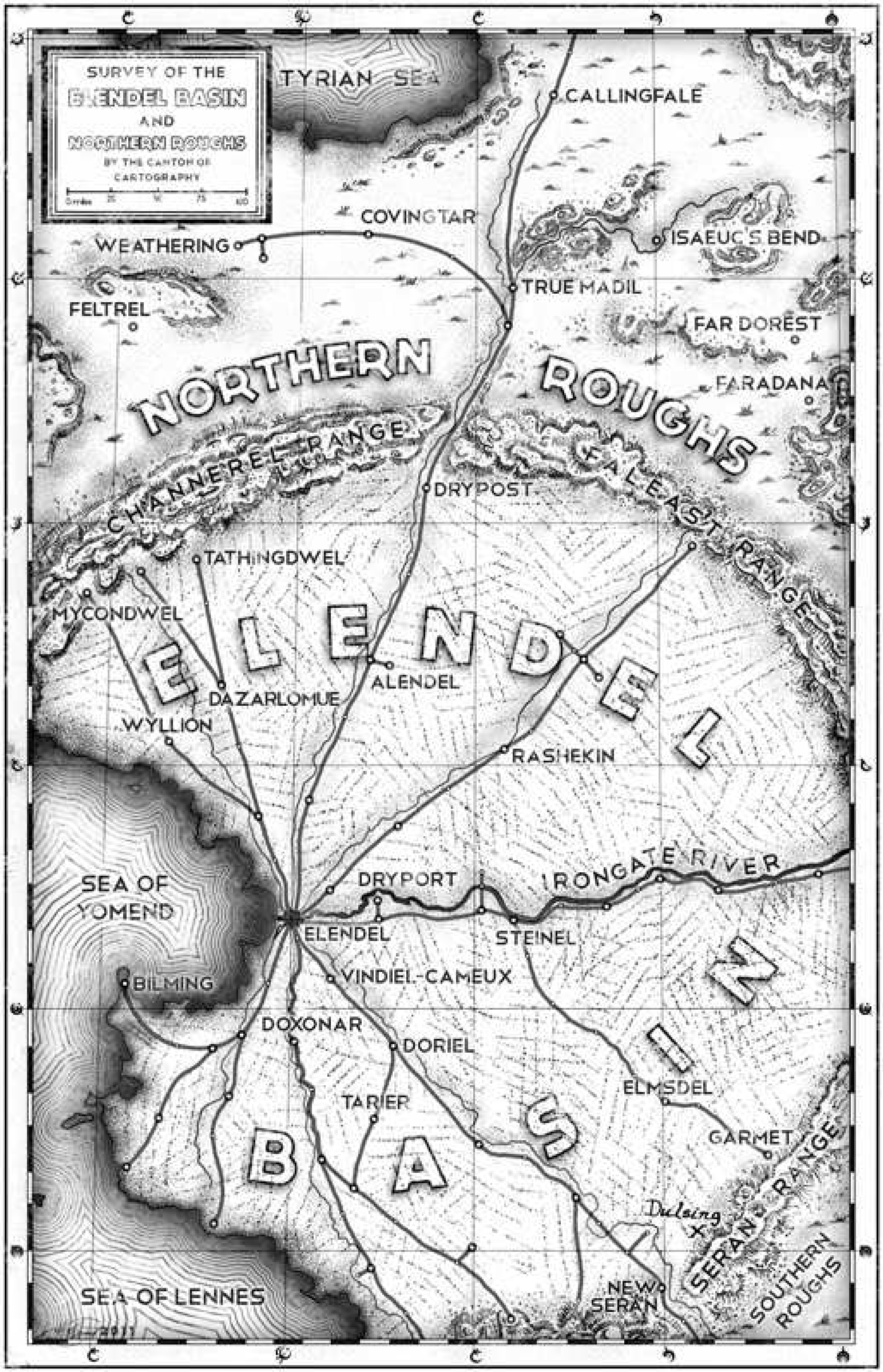
Michael Kramer, my personal favorite narrator—and one I know I'm probably making blush right now, as he has to read this line to you all who are listening. At Macmillan Audio, I'd like to thank Robert Allen, Samantha Edelson, and Mitali Dave.

Continuity, all-around editing feedback, and countless other jobs were done by the Immaculate Peter Ahlstrom. Also working here on my team are Kara Stewart, Karen Ahlstrom, and Adam Horne. And, of course, my lovely wife, Emily.

We leaned extra hard on my beta readers for this one, as the book didn't have the chance to go through writing group. That team is: Peter Ahlstrom, Alice Arneson, Gary Singer, Eric James Stone, Brian T. Hill, Kristina Kugler, Kim Garrett, Bob Kluttz, Jakob Remick, Karen Ahlstrom, Kalyani Poluri, Ben "wooo this book is dedicated to me, look how important I am" Olsen, Lyndsey Luther, Samuel Lund, Bao Pham, Aubree Pham, Megan Kanne, Jory Phillips, Trae Cooper, Christi Jacobsen, Eric Lake, and Isaac Stewar†. (For those wondering, Ben was a founding member of my original writing group with Dan Wells and Peter Ahlstrom. A computer person by trade, and the only one of us in that original group who had no aspirations toward working in publishing, he's been a valued reader and friend for many years. He also introduced me to the Fallout series, so there's that as well.) Community proofreaders included most of the above plus: Kerry Wilcox, David Behrens, Ian McNatt, Sarah Fletcher, Matt Wiens, and Joe Dowswell.

Well, that was a mouthful! These folks are wonderful, and if you compare my early books to my later ones, I think you'll find that the assistance of these people has been invaluable in not only slaying typos but also helping me tighten narratives. Finally, though, I'd like to thank you readers for sticking with me these ten years, and being willing to accept the strange ideas I throw at you. Mistborn is not quite halfway through the evolution I have planned for it. I can't wait for you to see what is coming your way, and this book is where some of that finally starts to be revealed.

Enjoy!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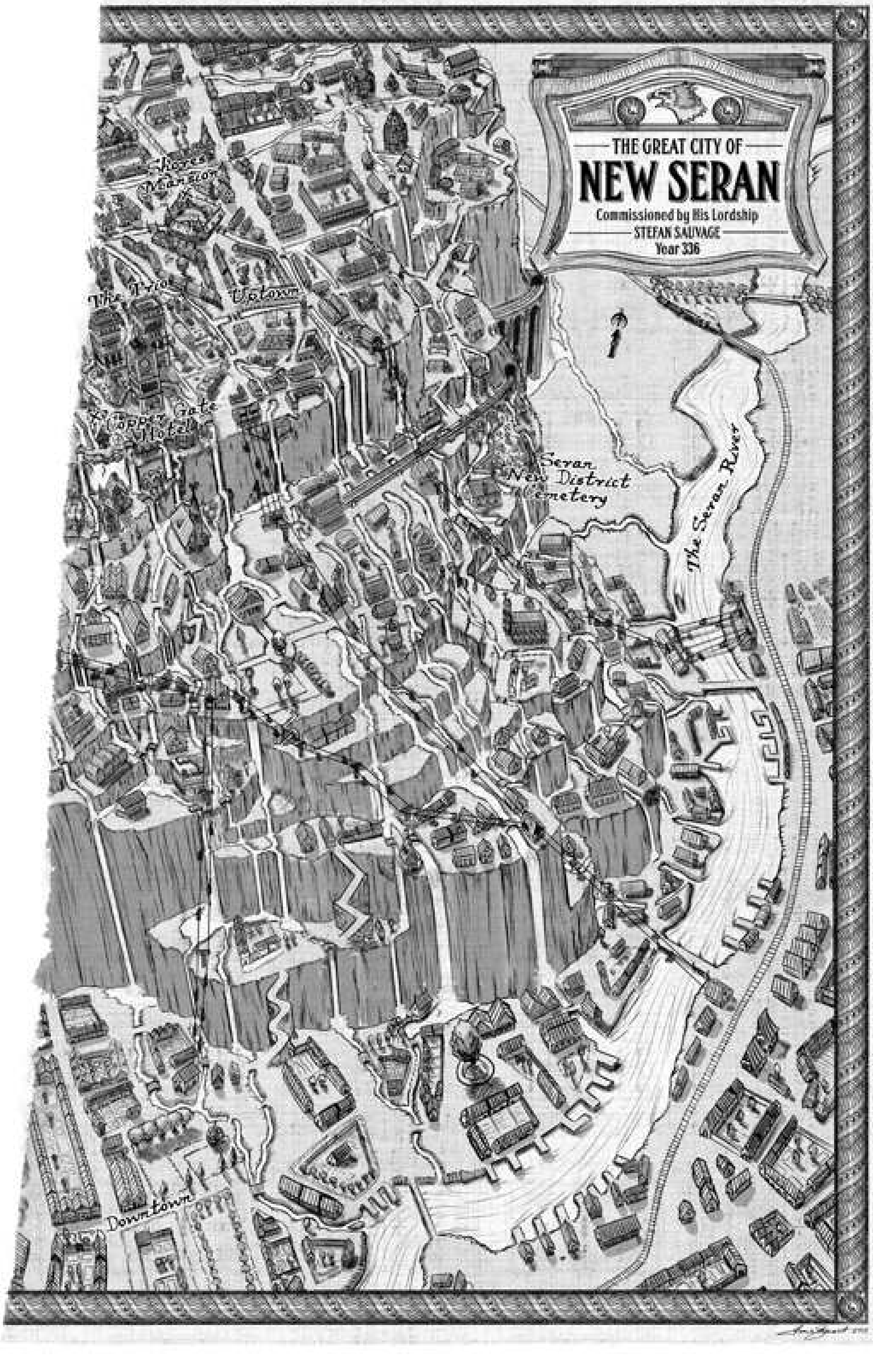
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PROLOGUE

“Telsin!” Waxillium hissed as he crept out of the training hut.

Glancing back, Telsin winced and crouched lower. At sixteen, Waxillium’s sister was one year older than he was. Her long dark hair framed a button nose and prim lips, and colorful V shapes ran up the front of her traditional Terris robes. Those always seemed to fit her in a way his never did. On Telsin, they were elegant. Waxillium felt like he was wearing a sack.

“Go away, Asinthew,” she said, inching around the side of the hut.

“You’re going to miss evening recitation.”

“They won’t notice I’m gone. They never check.”

Inside the hut, Master Tellingdwar droned on about proper Terris attitudes. Submission, meekness, and what they called “respectful dignity.” He was speaking to the younger students; the older ones, like Waxillium and his sister, were supposed to be meditating.

Telsin scrambled away, moving through the forested area of Elendel referred to simply as the Village. Waxillium fretted, then hurried after his sister.

“You’re going to get into trouble,” he said once he caught up. He followed her around the trunk of an enormous oak tree. “You’re going to get *me* into trouble.”

“So?” she said. “What is it with you and rules anyway?”

“Nothing,” he said. “I just—”

She stalked off into the forest. He sighed and trailed after her, and eventually they met up with three other Terris youths: two girls and a tall boy. Kwashim, one of the girls, looked Waxillium up and down. She was dark-skinned and slender. “You brought *him*?”

“He followed me,” Telsin said.

Waxillium smiled at Kwashim hopefully, then at Idashwy, the other girl. She had wide-set eyes and was his own age. And Harmony … she was gorgeous. She noticed his attention on her and blinked a few times, then glanced away, a demure smile on her lips.

“He’ll tell on us,” Kwashim said, drawing his attention away from the other girl. “You know he will.”

“I won’t,” Waxillium snapped.

Kwashim gave Waxillium a glare. “You might miss evening class. Who’ll answer all the questions? It will be rusting quiet in the classroom with nobody to fawn over the teacher.”

Forch, the tall boy, stood just inside the shadows. Waxillium didn’t look at Forch, didn’t meet his eyes. *He doesn’t know, right? He can’t know.* Forch was the oldest of them, but rarely said much.

He was Twinborn, like Waxillium. Not that either of them used their Allomancy much these days. In the Village, it was their Terris side—their Feruchemy—that was lauded. The fact that both he and Forch were Coinshots didn’t matter to the Terris.

“Let’s go,” Telsin said. “No more arguing. We probably don’t have much time. If my brother wants to tag along, then fine.”

They followed her beneath the canopy, feet crackling on leaves. With this much foliage, you could easily forget you were in the middle of an enormous city. The sounds of shouting men and iron-shod hooves on cobbles were distant, and you couldn’t see or smell the smoke in here. The Terris worked hard to keep their section of the city tranquil, quiet, peaceful.

Waxillium should have loved it here.

The group of five youths soon approached the Synod's Lodge, where the ranking Terris elders had their offices. Telsin waved for the group of them to wait while she hurried up to a particular window to listen. Waxillium found himself looking about, anxious. Evening was approaching, the forest growing dim, but *anyone* could walk along and find them.

Don't worry so much, he told himself. He needed to join in their antics like his sister did. Then they'd see him as one of them. Right?

Sweat trickled down the sides of his face. Nearby, Kwashim leaned against a tree, completely unconcerned, a smirk growing on her lips as she noticed how nervous he was. Forch stood in the shadows, not crouching, but *rusts*—he could have been one of the trees, for all the emotion he showed. Waxillium glanced at Idashwy, with her large eyes, and she blushed, looking away.

Telsin snuck back to them. "She's in there."

"That's our grandmother's office," Waxillium said.

"Of course it is," Telsin said. "And she got called into her office for an emergency. Right, Idashwy?"

The quiet girl nodded. "I saw Elder Vwafendal running past my meditation room."

Kwashim grinned. "So she won't be watching."

"Watching what?" Waxillium asked.

"The Tin Gate," Kwashim said. "We can get out into the city. This is going to be even easier than usual!"

"Usual?" Waxillium said, looking in horror from Kwashim to his sister. "You've done this *before*?"

"Sure," Telsin said. "Hard to get a good drink in the Village. Great pubs two streets over though."

"You're an *outsider,*" Forch said to him as he stepped up. He spoke slowly, deliberately, as if each word required separate consideration. "Why should you care if we leave? Look, you're shaking. What are you afraid of? You lived most of your life out there."

You're an outsider, they said. Why was his sister always able to worm her way into any group? Why did he always have to stand on the outside?

"I'm not shaking," Waxillium said to Forch. "I just don't want to get into trouble."

"He's *going* to turn us in," Kwashim said.

"I'm not." *Not for this anyway,* Waxillium thought.

"Let's go," Telsin said, leading the pack through the forest to the Tin Gate, which was a fancy name for something that was really just another street—though granted, it had a stone archway etched with ancient Terris symbols for the sixteen metals.

Beyond it lay a different world. Glowing gas lamps marching along streets, newsboys trudging home for the night with unsold broadsheets tucked under their arms. Workers heading to the rowdy pubs for a drink. He'd never really known that world; he'd grown up in a lavish mansion stuffed with fine clothes, caviar, and wine.

Something about that simple life called to him. Perhaps he'd find *it* there. The thing he'd never found. The thing everyone else seemed to have, but he couldn't even put a name to.

The other four youths scuttled out, passing the building with shadowed windows where Waxillium and Telsin's grandmother would usually be sitting and reading this time of night. The Terris didn't employ guards at the entrances to their domain, but they *did* watch.

Waxillium didn't leave, not yet. He looked down, pulling back the sleeves of his robe to expose the metalmind bracers he wore there.

"You coming?" Telsin called to him.

He didn't respond.

"Of course you're not. You never want to risk trouble."

She led Forch and Kwashim away. Surprisingly though, Idashwy lingered. The quiet girl looked back at him questioningly.

I can do this, Waxillium thought. *It's nothing big.* His sister's taunt ringing in his ears, he forced himself forward and joined Idashwy. He felt sick, but he fell in beside her, enjoying her shy smile.

“So, what was the emergency?” he asked Idashwy.

“Huh?”

“The emergency that called Grandmother away?”

Idashwy shrugged, pulling off her Terris robe, briefly shocking him until he saw that she wore a conventional skirt and blouse underneath. She tossed the robe into the bushes. “I don’t know much. I saw your grandmother running to the Synod Lodge, and overheard Tathed asking about it. Some kind of crisis. We were planning to slip out tonight, so I figured, you know, this would be a good time.”

“But the emergency…” Waxillium said, looking over his shoulder.

“Something about a constable captain coming to question her,” Idashwy said.

A *constable*?

“Let’s go, Asinthew,” she said, taking his hand. “Your grandmother is likely to make short work of the outsider. She could be on her way here already!”

He’d frozen in place.

Idashwy looked at him. Those lively brown eyes made it hard for him to think. “Come on,” she urged. “Sneaking out is hardly even an infraction. Didn’t you *live* out here for fourteen years?”

Rusts.

“I need to go,” he said, turning back to run toward the forest.

Idashwy stood in place as he left her. Waxillium entered the woods, sprinting for the Synod Lodge. *You know she’s going to think you’re a coward now,* part of him observed. *They all will.*

Waxillium skidded to the ground outside his grandmother’s office window, heart thumping. He pressed against the wall, and yes, he *could* hear something through the open window.

“We police ourselves, constable,” Grandmother Vwafendal said from inside. “You know this.”

Waxillium dared to push himself up, peeking in the window to see Grandmother seated at her desk, a picture of Terris rectitude, with her hair in a braid and her robes immaculate.

The man standing across the desk from her held his constable's hat under his arm as a sign of respect. He was an older man with drooping mustaches, and the insignia on his breast marked him as a captain and a detective. High rank. Important.

Yes! Waxillium thought, fiddling in his pocket for his notes.

"The Terris police themselves," the constable said, "because they rarely need policing."

"They don't need it now."

"My informant—"

"So now you have an informant?" Grandmother asked. "I thought it was an anonymous tip."

"Anonymous, yes," the constable said, laying a sheet of paper on the desk. "But I consider this more than just a 'tip.'"

Waxillium's grandmother picked up the sheet. Waxillium knew what it said. He'd sent it, along with a letter, to the constables in the first place.

A shirt that smells of smoke, hanging behind his door.

Muddied boots that match the size of the prints left outside the burned building.

Flasks of oil in the chest beneath his bed.

The list contained a dozen clues pointing to Forch as the one who'd burned the dining lodge to the ground earlier in the month. It thrilled Waxillium to see that the constables had taken his findings seriously.

"Disturbing," Grandmother said, "but I don't see anything on this list that gives you the right to intrude upon our domain, Captain."

The constable leaned down to rest his hands on the edge of her desk, confronting her. "You weren't so quick to reject our help when we sent a fire brigade to extinguish that blaze."

"I will always accept help saving lives," Grandmother said. "But I need no help in locking them away. Thank you."

"Is it because this Forch is Twinborn? Are you frightened of his powers?"

She gave him a scornful look.

"Elder," he said, taking a deep breath. "You have a criminal among you —"

"*If* we do," she said, "we will deal with the individual ourselves. I have visited the houses of sorrow and destruction you outsiders call prisons, Captain. I will not see one of my own immured there based on hearsay and anonymous fancies sent via post."

The constable breathed out and stood up straight again. He set something new down on the desk with a snap. Waxillium squinted to see, but the constable was covering the object with his hand.

"Do you know much about arson, Elder?" the constable asked softly. "It's often what we call a companion crime. You find it used to cover a burglary, to perpetrate fraud, or as an act of initial aggression. In a case like this, the fire is commonly just a harbinger. At best you have a firebug who is waiting to burn again. At worst … well, something bigger is coming, Elder. Something you'll all regret."

Grandmother drew her lips to a line. The constable removed his hand, revealing what he'd put on the desk. A bullet.

"What is this?" Grandmother said.

"A reminder."

Grandmother slapped it off the table, sending it snapping against the wall near where Waxillium hid. He jumped back and crouched lower, heart pounding.

"Do not bring your instruments of death into this place," Grandmother hissed.

Waxillium got back to the window in time to see the constable settling his hat on his head. "When that boy burns something again," he said softly, "send for me. Hopefully it won't be too late. Good evening."

He left without a further word. Waxillium huddled against the side of the building, worried the constable would look back and see him. It didn't happen. The man marched out along the path, disappearing into the evening shadows.

But Grandmother … she hadn't believed. Couldn't she see? Forch had committed a crime. They were just going to leave him alone? Why—

"Asinthew," Grandmother said, using Waxillium's Terris name as she always did. "Would you please join me?"

He felt an immediate spike of alarm, followed by shame. He stood up. "How did you know?" he said through the window.

"Reflection on my mirror, child," she said, holding a cup of tea in both hands, not looking toward him. "Obey. If you please."

Sullenly, he trudged around the building and through the front doors of the wooden lodge. The whole place smelled of the wood stain he'd recently helped apply. He still had the stuff under his fingernails.

He stepped into the room and shut the door. "Why did you—"

"Please sit down, Asinthew," she said softly.

He walked to the desk, but didn't take the guest seat. He remained standing, right where the constable had.

"Your handwriting," Grandmother said, brushing at the paper the constable had left. "Did I not tell you that the matter of Forch was under control?"

"You say a lot of things, Grandmother. I believe when I see proof."

Vwafendal leaned forward, steam rising from the cup in her hands. "Oh, Asinthew," she said. "I thought you were determined to fit in here."

"I am."

"Then why are you listening at my window instead of doing evening meditations?"

He looked away, blushing.

"The Terris way is about *order,* child," Grandmother said. "We have rules for a reason."

"And burning down buildings isn't against the rules?"

"Of *course* it is," Grandmother said. "But Forch is not your responsibility. We've spoken to him. He's penitent. His crime was that of a misguided youth who spends too much time alone. I've asked some of the others to befriend him. He *will* do penance for his crime, in our way. Would you rather see him rot in prison?”

Waxillium hesitated, then sighed, dropping into the chair before his grandmother’s desk. “I want to find out what is right,” he whispered, “and do it. Why is that so hard?”

Grandmother frowned. “It’s easy to discover what is right and wrong, child. I will admit that always *choosing* to follow what you know you should do is—”

“No,” Waxillium said. Then he winced. It wasn’t wise to interrupt Grandmother V. She never yelled, but her disapproval could be sensed as surely as an imminent thunderstorm. He continued more softly. “No, Grandmother. Finding out what’s right *isn’t* easy.”

“It is written in our ways. It is taught every day in your lessons.”

“That’s one voice,” Waxillium said, “one philosophy. There are so many. …”

Grandmother reached across the desk and put her hand on his. Her skin was warm from holding the teacup. “Ah, Asinthew,” she said. “I understand how hard it must be for you. A child of two worlds.”

Two worlds, he thought immediately, *but no home.*

“But you must heed what you are taught,” Grandmother continued. “You promised me you would obey our rules while you were here.”

“I’ve been trying.”

“I know. I hear good reports from Tellingdwar and your other instructors. They say you learn the material better than anyone—that it’s as if you’ve lived here all your life! I’m proud of your effort.”

“The other kids don’t accept me. I’ve tried to do as you say—to be *more* Terris than anyone, to *prove* my blood to them. But the kids … I’ll never be one of them, Grandmother.”

“‘Never’ is a word youths often use,” Grandmother said, sipping her tea, “but rarely understand. Let the rules become your guide. In them, you will find peace. If some are resentful because of your zeal, let them be. Eventually, through meditation, they will make peace with such emotions.”

"Could you … maybe order a few of the others to befriend me?" he found himself asking, ashamed of how weak it sounded to say the words. "Like you did with Forch?"

"I will see," Grandmother said. "Now, off with you. I will not report this indiscretion, Asinthew, but please promise me you will set aside this obsession with Forch and leave the punishment of others to the Synod."

Waxillium moved to stand up, and his foot slipped on something. He reached down. *The bullet.*

"Asinthew?" Grandmother asked.

He trapped the bullet in his fist as he straightened, then hurried out the door.

* * *

"Metal is your life," Tellingdwar said from the front of the hut, moving into the final parts of the evening recitation.

Waxillium knelt in meditation, listening to the words. Around him, rows of peaceful Terris were similarly bowed in reverence, offering praise to Preservation, the ancient god of their faith.

"Metal is your soul," Tellingdwar said.

So much was perfect in this quiet world. Why did Waxillium sometimes feel like he was dragging dirt in solely by being here? That they were all part of one big white canvas, and he a smudge at the bottom?

"You preserve us," Tellingdwar said, "and so we will be yours."

A bullet, Waxillium thought, the bit of metal still clenched in his palm. *Why did he leave a bullet as a reminder? What does it mean?* It seemed an odd symbol.

Recitation complete, the youths, children, and adults alike rose and stretched. There was some jovial interaction, but curfew had nearly arrived, which meant that the younger set had to be on their way to their homes—or in Waxillium's case, the dormitories. He remained kneeling anyway.

Tellingdwar started gathering up the mats people had used for kneeling. He kept his head shaved; his robes were bright yellows and oranges. Arms laden with mats, he paused as he noticed Waxillium hadn't left with the others. "Asinthew? Are you well?"

Waxillium nodded tiredly, climbing to his feet, legs numb from kneeling so long. He plodded toward the exit, where he paused. "Tellingdwar?"

"Yes, Asinthew?"

"Has there ever been a violent crime in the Village?"

The short steward froze, his grip tightening on the load of mats. "What makes you ask?"

"Curiosity."

"You needn't worry. That was long ago."

"*What* was long ago?"

Tellingdwar retrieved the remaining mats, moving more quickly than before. Perhaps someone else would have avoided the question, but Tellingdwar was as candid as they came. A classic Terris virtue—in his eyes, avoiding a question would be as bad as lying.

"I'm not surprised they're still whispering about it," Tellingdwar said. "Fifteen years can't wash away that blood, I suppose. The rumors are wrong, however. Only one person was killed. A woman, by her husband's hand. Both Terris." He hesitated. "I knew them."

"How did he kill her?"

"Must you know this?"

"Well, the rumors…"

Tellingdwar sighed. "A gun. An outsider weapon. We don't know where he got it." Tellingdwar shook his head, dropping the mats into a stack at the side of the room. "I guess we shouldn't be surprised. Men are the same everywhere, Asinthew. You must remember this. Do not think yourself better than another because you wear the robe."

Trust Tellingdwar to turn any conversation into a lesson. Waxillium nodded to him and slipped out into the night. The sky rumbled above, foretelling rain, but there was no mist yet.

Men are the same everywhere, Asinthew.… What was the purpose, then, of everything they taught in here? If it couldn't prevent men from acting like monsters?

He reached the boys' dorm, which was quiet. It was just after curfew, and Waxillium had to bow his head to the dormmaster in apology before rushing down the hallway and into his room on the ground floor. Waxillium's father had insisted he be given a room to himself, because of his noble heritage. That had only served to set him apart from the others.

He shucked off his robe and threw open his wardrobe. His old clothing hung there. Rain began to patter against his window as he threw on some trousers and a buttoning shirt, which he found more comfortable than those rusting robes. He trimmed his lamp and sat back on his cot, opening a book for some evening reading.

Outside, the sky rumbled like an empty stomach. Waxillium tried to read for a few minutes, then tossed the book aside—nearly knocking over his lamp—and threw himself to his feet. He walked to the window, watching the water stream down. It fell in patches and columns, because of the thick canopy of leaves. He reached over and extinguished the lamp.

He stared at the rain, thoughts tumbling in his head. He'd have to make a decision soon. The agreement between his grandmother and his parents required Waxillium to spend one year in the Village, and only a month of that remained. After that, it would be his choice whether to stay or to leave.

What awaited him outside? White tablecloths, posturing people with nasal accents, and politics.

What awaited him here? Quiet rooms, meditation, and boredom.

A life he detested or a life of mind-numbing repetition. Day after day after day … and …

Was that someone moving through the trees?

Waxillium perked up, pressing against the cool glass. That *was* someone trudging through the wet forest, a shadowed figure with a familiar height and posture, stooped and carrying a sack over his shoulder. Forch glanced toward the dormitory, but then continued on into the night.

So they were back. That was faster than he'd expected. What was Telsin's plan for getting into the dorms? Slip in through the windows, then claim they'd come home before curfew and the dormmaster just hadn't seen them?

Waxillium waited, wondering if he'd spot the three girls as well, but saw nothing. Only Forch, disappearing into the shadows. Where was he going?

Another fire, Waxillium thought immediately. But Forch wouldn't do it in this rain, would he?

Waxillium glanced at the clock ticking quietly on his wall. An hour after curfew. He hadn't realized he'd spent so much time staring at the rain.

Forch is not my problem, he told himself firmly. He walked back to lie on his bed, but soon found himself pacing instead. Listening to the rain, anxious, unable to stop his body from moving.

Curfew …

Let the rules become your guide. In them find peace.

He stopped beside the window. Then he pushed it open and leaped out, bare feet sinking into the wet, rubbery ground. He scrambled forward, streams of water spraying across his head, trickling down the back of his shirt. Which way had Forch gone?

He took his best guess, passing enormous trees like hewn monoliths, the rush of rain and streaming water drowning out all else. A boot print in the mud near a tree trunk hinted he was on the right track, but he had to lean down low to see it. Rusts! It was getting dark out here.

Where next? Waxillium turned about. *There,* he thought. *Storage hall.* An old dormitory, now unoccupied, where the Terris kept extra furniture and rugs. That would be a perfect target for arson, right? Plenty of stuff inside to burn, and nobody would expect it in this rain.

But Grandmother spoke to him, Waxillium thought, scrambling through the rain, feet cold as he kicked up fallen leaves and moss. *They'll know it was him.* Didn't he care? Was he *trying* to get into trouble?

Waxillium stepped up to the old dormitory, a three-story mass of blackness in the already dark night, showers of water streaming off its eaves. Waxillium tested the door, and it was unlocked of course—this was the Village. He slipped inside.

There. A pool of water on the floor. Someone *had* entered here recently. He followed in a crouch, touching the footprints one after another, until he reached the stairwell. Up one flight, then another. What was up here? He reached the top floor and saw a light ahead. Waxillium crept through a hallway with a rug down the center, approaching what turned out to be a flickering candle set on a table in a small room cluttered with furniture and with dark, heavy drapes on the walls.

Waxillium stepped up to the candle. It shivered, frail and alone. Why had Forch left it here? What was—

Something heavy smashed across Waxillium's back. He gasped in pain, thrown forward by the blow, stumbling into a pair of chairs stacked atop one another. Boots thumped on the floor behind him. Waxillium managed to throw himself to the side, rolling to the floor as Forch smashed an old wooden post into the chairs, cracking them.

Waxillium scrambled to his feet, his shoulders throbbing. Forch turned toward him, face all in shadow.

Waxillium backed away. "Forch! It's all right. I just want to talk." He winced as his back hit the wall. "You don't have to—"

Forch came at him swinging. Waxillium yelped and ducked into the hallway. "Help!" he shouted as Forch followed him. *"Help!"*

Waxillium had meant to scramble toward the stairs, but he'd gotten turned around. Instead he was running away from them. He slammed his shoulder against the door at the end of the hallway. That would lead to the upper meeting room, if the dormitory here had the same layout as his own. And maybe another set of steps?

Waxillium pushed through the door and into a brighter room. Old tables stacked atop one another surrounded an open space at the center, like an audience and a stage.

There, in the middle and lit by a dozen candles, a young boy of maybe five lay tied to a wooden plank that stretched between two tables. His shirt had been cut off and lay on the floor. His cries were muffled by a gag, and he struggled weakly against his bonds.

Waxillium stumbled to a halt, taking in the boy, the line of gleaming knives set out on a table nearby, the trails of blood from cuts on the boy's chest.

"Oh, hell," Waxillium whispered.

Forch entered behind him, then closed the door with a click.

"Oh, *hell*," Waxillium said, turning, wide-eyed. "Forch, what is wrong with you?"

"Don't know," the young man said softly. "I've just got to see what's inside. You know?"

"You went with the girls," Waxillium said, "so you'd have an alibi. If your room is found empty, you'll say you were with them. A lesser infraction to hide your true crime. Rusts! My sister and the others don't know that you slipped back, do they? They're out there drunk, and they won't even remember that you were gone. They'll swear you were—"

Waxillium cut off as Forch looked up, eyes reflecting candlelight, face expressionless. He held up a handful of nails.

That's right. Forch is a—

Waxillium shouted, throwing himself toward a pile of furniture as nails zipped from Forch's hand, Pushed by his Allomancy. They hit like hail, snapping against wooden tables, chair legs, and the floor. A sudden pain struck Wax in the arm as he scuttled backward.

He cried out, grabbing his arm as he got behind cover. One of the nails had ripped off a chunk of his flesh near the elbow.

Metal. He needed *metal*.

It had been months since he'd burned steel. Grandmother wanted him to embrace his Terris side. He raised his arms, and found them bare. His bracers …

In your room, idiot, Waxillium thought. He fished in his trouser pocket. He always used to keep …

A pouch of metal flakes. He dug it out as he scrambled away from Forch, who threw aside tables and chairs to get to him. In the background, the captive child whimpered.

Waxillium's fingers trembled as he tried to get the packet of metal flakes open, but it suddenly leaped from his fingers and shot across the room. He spun on Forch, desperate, just in time to see the man slide a metal bar off a table and toss it.

Waxillium tried to duck. Too slow. The Steelpushed bar slammed against his chest, throwing him backward. Forch grunted, stumbling. He wasn't practiced with his Allomancy, and hadn't properly braced himself. His Push threw him backward as much as it tossed Waxillium.

Still, Waxillium hit the wall with a grunt, and he felt something *crack* inside of him. He gasped, his vision blackening as he dropped to his knees. The room wavered.

The pouch. Get the pouch!

He searched the floor around him, frantic, barely able to think. He needed that metal! His fingers, bloodied, brushed it. Eager, he snatched the pouch and pulled open the cloth top. He tipped back his head to dump the flakes in.

A shadow thundered over to him and kicked him in the stomach. The broken bone inside of Waxillium gave, and he screamed, having gotten barely a pinch of metal into his mouth. Forch slapped the pouch out of his hand, scattering the flakes, then picked him up.

The youth looked bulkier than he should have. Tapping a metalmind. A frenzied part of Waxillium's brain tried to Push on the man's bracers, but Feruchemical metalminds were infamously difficult to affect with Allomancy. His Push wasn't strong enough.

Forch shoved Waxillium out the open window, dangling him by his neck. Rain washed over Waxillium, and he struggled for breath. "Please … Forch…"

Forch dropped him.

Waxillium fell with the rain.

Three stories down, through the branches of a maple tree, scattering wet leaves.

Steel burned to life inside of him, spraying blue lines from his chest to nearby sources of metal. All above, none below. Nothing to Push on to save himself.

Except one bit in his trouser pocket.

Waxillium Pushed on it, desperate, as he tumbled in the air. It shot through his pocket, down along his leg, cutting a line in the side of his foot before being propelled down into the ground by his weight. Waxillium jerked in the air, slowing as soon as the bit of metal hit the ground.

He crashed onto the sodden pathway feet-first, pain jolting up his legs. He fell back to the ground, and found himself dazed but alive. His Push had saved him.

Rain fell on his face. He waited, but Forch didn't come down to finish him off. The youth had slammed the shutters, perhaps worried someone would see the light of his candles.

Every part of Waxillium ached. Shoulders from the first blow, legs from the fall, chest from the bar—how many ribs had he broken? He lay there in the rain, coughing, before finally rolling over to find the bit of metal that had saved his life. He found it easily by following its Allomantic line, and dug in the mud, pulling out something and holding it up.

The constable's bullet. Rain washed his hand, cleansing the metal. He didn't even remember stuffing it into his pocket.

In a case like this, the fire is often just a harbinger.…

He should go get help. But that boy above was already bleeding. The knives were out.

Something bigger is coming, Elder. Something you'll all regret.

Suddenly Waxillium hated Forch. This place was perfect, serene. Beautiful. Darkness shouldn't exist here. If Waxillium was a smudge on the white canvas, this man was a pit of pure blackness.

Waxillium shouted, climbing to his feet and throwing himself through the back door and into the old building. He climbed two flights in a haze of stumbling pain before slamming open the door into the meeting room. Forch stood above the weeping child, a bloody knife in his hand. He turned his head slowly, showing Waxillium one eye, half of his face.

Waxillium threw the single bullet up between them, its casing glittering in candlelight, then *Pushed* with everything he had. Forch turned and Pushed back.

The reaction was immediate. The bullet stopped in midair, inches from Forch's face. Both men were thrown backward, but Forch caught himself on a group of tables, staying steady. Waxillium was slammed against the wall beside the doorway.

Forch smiled, and his muscles swelled, strength drawn from his metalmind. He pulled his bar from the table of knives and threw it at Waxillium, who cried out, Pushing against it to stop it from smashing him.

He wasn't strong enough. Forch continued to *Push,* and Waxillium had so little steel. The bar slipped forward in the air, pressing against Waxillium's chest, pushing him against the wall.

Time froze. One bullet hanging just before Forch, their main fight over the bar which—bit by bit—crushed Waxillium. His chest flared in pain, and a scream slipped from his lips.

He was going to die here.

I just want to do what is right. Why is that so hard?

Forch stepped forward, grinning.

Waxillium's eyes fixed on that bullet, glittering golden. He couldn't breathe. But that bullet …

Metal is your life.

A bullet. Three parts metal. The tip.

Metal is your soul.

The casing.

You preserve us …

And the knob at the back. The spot the hammer would hit.

In that moment, to Waxillium's eyes, they split into three lines, three parts. He took them all in at once. And then, as the bar crushed him, he let go of two bits.

And *shoved* on that knob at the back.

The bullet exploded. The casing flipped backward into the air, Pushed by Forch's Allomancy, while the bullet itself zipped forward, untouched, before drilling into Forch's skull.

Waxillium dropped to the ground, the bar propelled away. He collapsed in a heap, gasping for breath, rainwater streaming from his face to the wooden floor.

In a daze, he heard voices below. People finally responding to the shouts, then the sound of gunfire. He forced himself to his feet and limped through the room, ignoring the voices of Terrismen and women who climbed the steps. He reached the child and ripped off the bonds, freeing him. Instead of running in fear, however, the little boy grabbed Waxillium's leg and held on tight, weeping.

People poured into the room. Waxillium leaned down, picking up the bullet casing off the wet floor, then stood up straight and faced them. Tellingdwar. His grandmother. The elders. He registered their horror, and knew in that moment they would hate him because he had brought violence into their village.

Hate him because he had been right.

He stood beside Forch's corpse and closed one hand around the bullet casing, resting his other on the head of the trembling child.

"I will find my own way," he whispered.

TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER

The hideout door slammed against the other wall, shedding a burst of dust. A wall of mist fell in around the man who had kicked it open, outlining his silhouette: a mistcoat, tassels flaring from motion, a combat shotgun held up to the side.

"Fire!" Migs cried.

The lads unloaded. Eight men, armed to their teeth, fired at the shadowy figure from behind their barricade inside the old pub. Bullets swarmed like insects, but *parted* around this man in the long coat. They pelted the wall, drilling holes in the door and splintering the doorframe. They cut trails through the encroaching mist, but the lawman, all black in the gloom, didn't so much as flinch.

Migs fired shot after shot, despairing. He emptied one pistol, then a second, then shouldered his rifle and fired as quickly as he could cock it. How had they gotten here? Rusts, how had this *happened*? It wasn't supposed to have gone like this.

"It's useless!" one of the lads cried. "He's gonna kill us all, Migs!"

"Why're you just standin' there?" Migs shouted at the lawman. "Be at it already!" He fired twice more. "What's wrong with you?"

"Maybe he's distracting us," one of the lads said, "so his pal can sneak up behind us."

"Hey, that's…" Migs hesitated, looking toward the one who had spoken. Round face. Simple, round coachman's hat, like a bowler, but flatter on top. Who was that man again? He counted his crew.

Nine?

The lad next to Migs smiled, tipped his hat, then decked him in the face.

It was over blurringly quick. The fellow in the coachman's cap laid out Slink and Guillian in an eyeblink. Then suddenly he was closer to the two on the far side, slapping them down with a pair of dueling canes. As Migs turned—fumbling for the gun he'd dropped—the lawman leaped over the barricade with tassels flying and kicked Drawers in the chin. The lawman spun, leveling his shotgun at the men on the other side.

They dropped their guns. Migs knelt, sweating, beside an overturned table. He waited for the gunshots.

They didn't come.

"Ready for you, Captain!" the lawman shouted. A pile of constables rushed through the doorway, disturbing the mists. Outside, morning light was starting to dispel those anyway. Rusts. Had they really holed up in here all night?

The lawman swung his gun down toward Migs. "You might want to drop that gun, friend," he said in a conversational tone.

Migs hesitated. “Just shoot me, lawman. I’m in too deep.”

“You shot two constables,” the man said, finger on the trigger. “But they’ll live, son. You won’t hang, if I have my way. Drop the gun.”

They’d called those same words before, from outside. This time, Migs found himself believing them. “Why?” he asked. “You coulda killed us all without breaking a sweat. *Why?*”

“Because,” the lawman said, “frankly, you’re not worth killing.” He smiled in a friendly-type way. “I’ve got enough on my conscience already. Drop the gun. We’ll get this sorted out.”

Migs dropped the gun and stood, then waved down Drawers, who was climbing up with his gun in hand. The man reluctantly dropped his weapon too.

The lawman turned, cresting the barricade with an Allomantic leap, and slammed his shortened shotgun into a holster on his leg. The younger man in the coachman’s hat joined him, whistling softly. He appeared to have swiped Guillian’s favorite knife; the ivory hilt was sticking out of his pocket.

“They’re yours, Captain,” the lawman said.

“Not staying for the booking, Wax?” the constable captain asked, turning.

“Unfortunately, no,” the lawman said. “I have to get to a wedding.”

“Whose?”

“Mine, I’m afraid.”

“You came on a raid the morning of your *wedding*?” the captain asked.

The lawman, Waxillium Ladrian, stopped in the doorway. “In my defense, it wasn’t my idea.” He nodded one more time to the assembled constables and gang members, then strode out into the mists.

PART ONE

1

Waxillium Ladrian hurried down the steps outside the bar-turned-hideout, passing constables in brown who bustled this way and that. The mists were already evaporating, dawn heralding the end of their vigil. He checked his arm, where a bullet had ripped a sizable hole through the cuff of his shirt and out the side of his jacket. He'd felt that one pass.

"Oi," Wayne said, hustling up beside him. "A good plan that one was, eh?"

"It was the same plan you always have," Wax said. "The one where I get to be the decoy."

"Ain't my fault people like to shoot at you, mate," Wayne said as they reached the coach. "You should be happy; you're usin' your talents, like me granners always said a man should do."

"I'd rather not have 'shootability' be my talent."

"Well, you gotta use what you have," Wayne said, leaning against the side of the carriage as Cob the coachman opened the door for Wax. "Same reason I always have bits of rat in my stew."

Wax looked into the carriage, with its fine cushions and rich upholstery, but didn’t climb in.

“You gonna be all right?” Wayne asked.

“Of course I am,” Wax said. “This is my second marriage. I’m an old hand at the practice by now.”

Wayne grinned. “Oh, is that how it works? ’Cuz in my experience, marryin’ is the one thing people seem to get worse at the more they do it. Well, that and bein’ alive.”

“Wayne, that was almost profound.”

“Damn. I was aimin’ for insightful.”

Wax stood still, looking into the carriage. The coachman cleared his throat, still standing and holding the door open for him.

“Right pretty noose, that is,” Wayne noted.

“Don’t be melodramatic,” Wax said, leaning to climb in.

“Lord Ladrian!” a voice called from behind.

Wax glanced over his shoulder, noting a tall man in a dark brown suit and bow tie pushing between a pair of constables. “Lord Ladrian,” the man said, “could I have a moment, please?”

“Take them all,” Wax said. “But do it without me.”

“But—”

“I’ll meet you there,” Wax said, nodding to Wayne. He dropped a spent bullet shell, then Pushed himself into the air. Why waste time on a carriage?

Steel at a comfortable burn inside his stomach, he shoved on a nearby electric streetlight—still shining, though morning had arrived—and soared higher into the air. Elendel spread before him, a soot-stained marvel of a city, leaking smoke from a hundred thousand different homes and factories. Wax shoved off the steel frame of a half-finished building nearby, then sent himself in a series of leaping bounds across the Fourth Octant.

He passed over a field of carriages for hire, rows of vehicles waiting quietly in ranks, early morning workers looking up at him as he passed. One pointed; perhaps the mistcoat had drawn his attention. Coinshot couriers weren’t an uncommon sight in Elendel, and men soaring through the air were rarely a point of interest.

A few more leaps took him over a series of warehouses in huddled rows. Wax thrilled in each jump. It was amazing how this could still feel so wonderful to him. The breeze in his face, the little moment of weightlessness when he hung at the very top of an arc.

All too soon, however, both gravity and duty reasserted themselves. He left the industrial district and crossed finer roadways, paved with pitch and gravel to create a smoother surface than cobbles for all those blasted motorcars. He spotted the Survivorist church easily, with its large glass and steel dome. Back in Weathering a simple wooden chapel had been sufficient, but that wasn’t nearly grand enough for Elendel.

The design was to allow those who worshipped full view of the mists at night. Wax figured if they wanted to see the mists, they’d do better just stepping outside. But perhaps he was being cynical. After all, the dome—which was made of segments of glass between steel supports, making it look like the sections of an orange—was able to open inward and let the mist pour down for special occasions.

He landed on a rooftop water tower across from the church. Perhaps when it had been built, the church’s dome had been tall enough to overshadow the surrounding buildings. It would have provided a nice profile. Now, buildings were rising taller and taller, and the church was dwarfed by its surroundings. Wayne would find a metaphor in that. Probably a crude one.

He perched on the water tower, looming over the church. So he was here, finally. He felt his eye begin to twitch, and an ache rose within him.

I think I loved you even on that day. So ridiculous, but so earnest.…

Six months ago, he’d pulled the trigger. He could still hear the gunshot.

Standing up, he pulled himself together. He’d healed this wound once. He could do so again. And if that left his heart crusted with scar tissue, then perhaps that was what he needed. He leaped off the water tower, then slowed by dropping and Pushing on a shell casing.

He hit the street and strode past a long line of carriages. Guests were already in attendance—Survivorist tenets called for weddings either very early in the morning or late at night. Wax nodded to several people he passed, and couldn't help slipping his shotgun out of its holster and resting it on his shoulder as he hopped up the steps and shoved the door open before him with a Steelpush.

Steris paced in the foyer, wearing a sleek white dress that had been chosen because the magazines said it was fashionable. With her hair braided and her makeup done by a professional for the occasion, she was actually quite pretty.

He smiled when he saw her. His stress, his nervousness, melted away a little.

Steris looked up as soon as he entered, then hurried to his side. "And?"

"I didn't get killed," he said, "so there's that."

She glanced at the clock. "You're late," she said, "but not very late."

"I'm … sorry?" She'd insisted he go on the raid. She'd planned for it, in fact. Such was life with Steris.

"I'm sure you did your best," Steris said, taking his arm. She was warm, and even trembling. Steris might be reserved, but unlike what some assumed, she wasn't emotionless.

"The raid?" she asked.

"Went well. No casualties." He walked with her to a side chamber, where Drewton—his valet—waited beside a table spread with Wax's white wedding suit. "You realize that by going on a raid on the morning of my wedding, I'll only reinforce this image that society has of me."

"Which image?"

"That of a ruffian," he said, taking off his mistcoat and handing it to Drewton. "A barely civilized lout from the Roughs who curses in church and goes to parties armed."

She glanced at his shotgun, which he'd tossed onto the sofa. "You enjoy playing with people's perceptions of you, don't you? You seek to make them uncomfortable, so they'll be off balance."

“It’s one of the simple joys I have left, Steris.” He smiled as Drewton unbuttoned his waistcoat. Then he pulled off both that and his shirt, leaving him bare-chested.

“I see I’m included in those you try to make uncomfortable,” Steris said.

“I work with what I have,” Wax said.

“Which is why you always have bits of rat in your stew?”

Wax hesitated in handing his clothing to Drewton. “He said that to you too?”

“Yes. I’m increasingly convinced he tries the lines out on me.” She folded her arms. “The little mongrel.”

“Not going to leave as I change?” Wax asked, amused.

“We’re to be married in less than an hour, Lord Waxillium,” she said. “I think I can stand to see you bare-chested. As a side note, *you’re* the Pathian. Prudishness is part of your belief system, not mine. I’ve read of Kelsier. From what I’ve studied, I doubt he’d care if—”

Wax undid the wooden buttons on his trousers. Steris blushed, before turning around and finally putting her back to him. She continued speaking a moment later, sounding flustered. “Well, at least you agreed to a proper ceremony.”

Wax smiled, settling down in his undershorts and letting Drewton give his face a quick shave. Steris remained in place, listening. Finally, as Drewton was wiping the cream from Wax’s face, she asked, “You have the pendants?”

“Gave them to Wayne.”

“You … *What?*”

“I thought you wanted some disturbances at the wedding,” Wax said, standing and taking the new set of trousers from Drewton. He slipped them on. He hadn’t worn white much since returning from the Roughs. It was harder to keep clean out there, which had made it worth wearing. “I figured this would work.”

“I wanted *planned* disturbances, Lord Waxillium,” Steris snapped. “It’s not upsetting if it’s understood, prepared for, and controlled. Wayne is rather the opposite of those things, wouldn’t you say?”

Wax did up his buttons and Drewton took his shirt off the hanger nearby. Steris turned around immediately upon hearing the sound, arms still folded, and didn't miss a beat—refusing to acknowledge that she'd been embarrassed. "I'm glad I had copies made."

"You made *copies* of our wedding pendants?"

"Yes." She chewed her lip a moment. "Six sets."

"*Six?*"

"The other four didn't arrive in time."

Wax grinned, doing up the buttons on his shirt, then letting his valet handle the cuffs. "You're one of a kind, Steris."

"Technically, so is Wayne—and actually so was Ruin, for that matter. If you consider it, that's not much of a compliment."

Wax strapped on suspenders, then let Drewton fuss with his collar. "I don't get it, Steris," he said, standing stiffly as the valet worked. "You prepare so thoroughly for things to go wrong—like you know and expect that life is unpredictable."

"Yes, and?"

"And life *is* unpredictable. So the only thing you do by preparing for disturbances is ensure that something *else* is going to go wrong."

"That's a rather fatalistic viewpoint."

"Living in the Roughs does that to a fellow." He eyed her, standing resplendent in her dress, arms crossed, tapping her left arm with her right index finger.

"I just … feel better when I try," Steris finally said. "It's like, if everything goes wrong, at least I *tried*. Does that make any sense?"

"As a matter of fact, I think it does."

Drewton stepped back, satisfied. The suit came with a very nice black cravat and vest. Traditional, which Wax preferred. Bow ties were for salesmen. He slid on the jacket, tails brushing the backs of his legs. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he strapped on his gunbelt and slid Vindication into her holster. He'd worn a gun to his last wedding, so why not this one? Steris nodded in approval.

Shoes went last. A new pair. They’d be hideously uncomfortable. “Are we late enough yet?” he asked Steris.

She checked the clock in the corner. “I planned for us to go in two minutes from now.”

“Ah, delightful,” he said, taking her arm. “That means we can be spontaneous and arrive early. Well, late-early.”

She clung to his arm, letting him steer her down the side chamber toward the entrance to the dome, and the church proper. Drewton followed behind.

“Are you … certain you wish to proceed?” Steris asked, stopping him before they entered the walkway to the dome.

“Having second thoughts?”

“Absolutely not,” Steris said immediately. “This union is quite beneficial to my house and status.” She took Wax’s left hand in both of hers. “But Lord Waxillium,” she said softly, “I don’t want you to feel trapped, particularly after what happened to you earlier this year. If you wish to back out, I will accept it as your will.”

The way she clutched his hand as she said those words sent a very different message. But she didn’t seem to notice. Looking at her, Wax found himself wondering. When he’d first agreed to the marriage, he’d done so out of duty to his house.

Now, he felt his emotions shifting. The way she’d been there for him these last months as he’d grieved … The way she looked at him right now …

Rust and Ruin. He was actually *fond* of Steris. It wasn’t love, but he doubted he would love again. This would do.

“No, Steris,” he said. “I would not back out. That … wouldn’t be fair to your house, and the money you have spent.”

“The money doesn’t—”

“It’s all right,” Wax said, giving her hand a little squeeze. “I have recovered enough from my ordeal. I’m strong enough to do this.”

Steris opened her mouth to reply, but a knock at the door heralded Marasi sticking her head in to check on them. With dark hair and softer, rounder features than Steris, Marasi wore bright red lipstick and a progressive lady’s attire—a pleated skirt, with a tight buttoned jacket.

“Finally,” she said. “Crowd is getting fidgety. Wax, there’s a man here wanting to see you. I’ve been trying to send him away, but … well…”

She came into the room and held the door open, revealing the same slender man in the brown suit and bow tie from before, standing with the ash girls in the antechamber that led to the dome proper.

“You,” Wax said. “How did you get here before Wayne?”

“I don’t believe your friend is coming,” the man said. He stepped in beside Marasi and nodded to her, then closed the doors, shutting out the ash girls. He turned and tossed Wax a wadded-up ball of paper.

When Wax caught it, it clinked. Unfolding it revealed the two wedding pendants. Scrawled on the paper were the words: *Gonna go get smashed till I can’t piss straight. Happy weddings ’n stuff.*

“Such beautiful imagery,” Steris observed, taking Wax’s wedding pendant in a white-gloved hand as Marasi looked over his shoulder to read the note. “At least he didn’t forget these.”

“Thank you,” Wax said to the man in brown, “but as you can see, I’m quite busy *getting married*. Whatever you need from me can—”

The man’s face turned translucent, displaying the bones of his skull and spine beneath.

Steris stiffened. “Holy One,” she whispered.

“Holy pain,” Wax said. “Tell Harmony to get someone else this time. I’m busy.”

“Tell … *Harmony*…” Steris mumbled, her eyes wide.

“Unfortunately, this is part of the problem,” the man in brown said, his skin returning to normal. “Harmony has been distracted as of late.”

“How can God be distracted?” Marasi asked.

“We’re not sure, but it has us worried. I need you, Waxillium Ladrian. I have a job you’ll find of interest. I realize you’re off to the ceremony, but afterward, if I could have a moment of your time…”

“No,” Wax said.

“But—”

“No.”

Wax pulled Steris by the arm, shoving open the doors, striding past Marasi, leaving the kandra. It had been six months since those creatures had manipulated him, played him, and lied to him. The result? A dead woman in his arms.

Bastards.

“Was that really one of the *Faceless Immortals*?” Steris said, looking over her shoulder.

“Yes, and for obvious reasons I want nothing to do with them.”

“Peace,” she said, holding his arm. “Do you need a moment?”

“No.”

“You’re sure?”

Wax stopped in place. She waited, and he breathed in and out, banishing from his mind that awful, *awful* scene when he’d knelt on a bridge alone, holding Lessie. A woman he realized he’d never actually known.

“I’m all right,” he said to Steris through clenched teeth. “But God should have known not to come for me. Particularly not today.”

“Your life is … decidedly odd, Lord Waxillium.”

“I know,” he said, moving again, stepping with her beside the last door before they entered the dome. “Ready?”

“Yes, thank you.” Was she … teary-eyed? It was an expression of emotion he’d never seen from her.

“Are *you* all right?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “Forgive me. It’s just … more wonderful than I’d imagined.”

They pushed open the doors, revealing the glistening dome, sunlight streaming through it and upon the waiting crowd. Acquaintances. Distant family members. Seamstresses and forgeworkers from his house. Wax sought out Wayne, and was surprised when he didn’t find the man, despite the note. He was the only real family Wax had.

The ash girls scampered out, sprinkling small handfuls of ash on the carpeted walkway that ringed the perimeter of the dome. Wax and Steris started forward in a stately walk, presenting themselves for those in attendance. There was no music at a Survivorist ceremony, but a few crackling braziers with green leaves on top let smoke trail upward to represent the mist.

Smoke ascends while ash falls, he thought, remembering the priest's words from his youth, back when he'd attended Survivorist ceremonies. They walked all the way around the crowd. At least Steris's family had made a decent showing, her father included—the red-faced man gave Waxillium an enthusiastic fist-raise as they passed.

Wax found himself smiling. This was what Lessie had wanted. They'd joked time and time again about their simple Pathian ceremony, finalized on *horseback* to escape a mob. She said that someday, she'd make him do it proper.

Sparkling crystal. A hushed crowd. Footsteps on scrunching carpet dappled with grey ash. His smile widened, and he looked to the side.

But of course, the wrong woman was there.

He almost stumbled. *Idiot man,* he thought. *Focus.* This day was important to Steris; the least he could do was not ruin it. Or rather, not ruin it in a way she hadn't expected. Whatever that meant.

Unfortunately, as they walked the remaining distance around the rotunda, his discomfort increased. He felt nauseous. Sweaty. Sick, like the feeling he had gotten the few times he had been forced to run from a killer and leave innocents in danger.

It all forced him, finally, to acknowledge a difficult fact. He wasn't ready. It wasn't Steris, it wasn't the setting. He just wasn't *ready* for this.

This marriage meant letting go of Lessie.

But he was trapped, and he *had* to be strong. He set his jaw and stepped with Steris onto the dais, where the priest stood between two stands topped with crystal vases of Marewill flowers. The ceremony was drawn from ancient Larsta beliefs, from Harmony’s *Beliefs Reborn,* a volume in the Words of Founding.

The priest spoke the words, but Wax couldn’t listen. All was numbness to him, teeth clenched, eyes straight ahead, muscles tense. They’d found a priest murdered in this very church. Killed by Lessie as she went mad. Couldn’t they have done something for her, instead of setting him on the hunt? Couldn’t they have *told* him?

Strength. He would *not* flee. He would *not* be a coward.

He held Steris’s hands, but couldn’t look at her. Instead, he turned his face upward to look out the glass dome toward the sky. Most of it was crowded out by the buildings. Skyscrapers on two sides, windows glistening in the morning sun. That water tower certainly did block the view, though as he watched, it shifted.…

Shifted?

Wax watched in horror as the legs under the enormous metal cylinder bent, as if to kneel, ponderously tipping their burden on its side. The top of the thing sheared off, spilling tons of water in a foaming wave.

He yanked Steris to him, arm firmly around her waist, then ripped off the second button down on his waistcoat and dropped it. He Pushed against this single metal button, launching himself and Steris away from the dais as the priest yelped in surprise.

Water *crashed* against the dome, which strained for the briefest of seconds before a section of it snapped open, hinges giving way inward to the water.

2

"Are you certain you're all right, my lord?" Wax asked, helping Lord Drapen, constable-general of the Sixth Octant, down the steps toward his carriage. Water trickled beside them in little streams, joining a small river in the gutters.

"Ruined my best pistol, you realize," Drapen said. "I'll have to send the thing to be cleaned and oiled!"

"Bill me the expense, my lord," Wax said, ignoring the fact that a good pistol would hardly be ruined by a little—or, well, a *lot* of—water. Wax turned the aging gentleman over to his coachman, sharing a resigned look, before turning and climbing back up the steps into the church. The carpet squished when he stepped on it. Or maybe that was his shoes.

He passed the priest bickering with the Erikell insurance assessor—come to do an initial report for when the church demanded payment on their policy—and entered the main dome. The one open section of glass still swung on its hinges up above, and the tipped water tower—its legs on the other side had kept it from crashing down completely—still blocked out much of the sky.

He passed overturned benches, discarded Marewill petals, and general refuse. Water dripped, the room's only sound other than the echoing voice of the priest. Wax squished his way up to the dais. Steris sat on its edge, wet dress plastered to her body, strands of hair that had escaped from her wedding braids sticking to the sides of her face. She sat with arms crossed on her knees, staring at the floor.

Wax sat down next to her. "So, next time a flood is dumped on our heads, I'll try to remember that jumping *upward* is a bad idea." He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and squeezed it out.

"You tried to get us backward too. It merely wasn't fast enough, Lord Waxillium."

He grunted. "Looks like simple structural failure. If it *was* instead some kind of assassination attempt … well, it was an incompetent one. There wasn't enough water in there to be truly dangerous. The worst injury was to Lord Steming, who fell and knocked his head when scrambling off his seat."

"No more than an accident then," Steris said. She flopped backward onto the dais, the carpet letting out a soft squish.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault." She sighed. "Do you ever wonder if perhaps the cosmere is out to overwhelm you, Lord Waxillium?"

"The cosmere? You mean Harmony?"

"No, not Him," Steris said. "Just cosmic chance rolling the dice anytime I pass, and always hitting all ones. There seems to be a poetry to it all." She closed her eyes. "Of *course* the wedding would fall apart. Several tons of water falling through the roof? Why wouldn't I have seen that? It's so utterly outlandish it *had* to happen. At least the priest didn't get murdered this time."

"Steris," Wax said, resting a hand on her arm. "We'll fix this. It will be all right."

She opened her eyes, looking toward him. "Thank you, Lord Waxillium."

"For what, exactly?" he asked.

"For being nice. For being willing to subject yourself to, well, me. I understand that it is not a pleasant concept."

"Steris…"

"Do not think me self-deprecating, Lord Waxillium," she said, sitting up and taking a deep breath, "and please do not assume I'm being morose. I am what I am, and I accept it. But I am under no illusions as to how my company is regarded. Thank you. For not making me feel as others have."

He hesitated. How did one respond to something like *that*? "It's not as you say, Steris. I think you're delightful."

"And the fact that you were gritting your teeth as the ceremony started, hands gripping as tightly as a man dangling for his life from the side of a bridge?"

"I…"

"Are you saddened at the fact that our wedding is delayed? Can you truly say it, and be honest as a lawman, Lord Waxillium?"

Damn. He floundered. He knew a few simple words could defuse or sidestep the question, but he couldn't find them, despite searching for what was an awkwardly long time—until saying anything would have sounded condescending.

"Perhaps," he said, smiling, "I'll just have to try something to relax me next time we attempt this."

"I doubt going to the ceremony drunk would be productive."

"I didn't say I'd drink. Perhaps some Terris meditation beforehand."

She eyed him. "You're still willing to move forward?"

"Of course." As long as it didn't have to be today. "I assume you have a backup dress?"

"Two," she admitted, letting him help her to her feet. "And I did reserve another date for a wedding two months from now. Different church—in case this one exploded."

He grunted. "You sound like Wayne."

"Well, things *do* tend to explode around you, Lord Waxillium." She looked up at the dome. "Considering that, getting drenched must be rather novel."

* * *

Marasi trailed around the outside of the flooded church, hands clasped behind her back, notebook a familiar weight in her jacket pocket. A few constables—all corporals—stood about looking as if they were in charge. That sort of thing was important in a crisis; statistics showed that if a uniformed authority figure was nearby, people were less likely to panic.

Of course, there was also a smaller percentage who were *more* likely to panic if an authority figure was nearby. Because people were people, and if there was one thing you could count on, it was that some of them would be weird. Or rather that *all* of them would be weird when circumstances happened to align with their own individual brand of insanity.

That said, today she hunted a very special kind of insane. She'd tried the nearby pubs first, but that was too obvious. Next she checked the gutters, one soup kitchen, and—against her better judgment—a purveyor of "novelties." No luck, though her backside did get *three* separate compliments, so there was that.

Finally, running out of ideas, she went to check if he'd decided to steal the forks from the wedding breakfast. There, in a dining hall across the street from the church, she found Wayne in the kitchens wearing a white jacket and a chef's hat. He was scolding several assistant cooks as they furiously decorated tarts with fruit glaze.

Marasi leaned against the doorway and watched, tapping her notebook with her pencil. Wayne sounded utterly unlike himself, instead using a sharp, nasal voice with an accent she couldn't quite place. Easterner, perhaps? Some of the outer cities there had thick accents.

The assistant cooks didn't question him. They jumped at what he said, bearing his condemnation as he tasted a chilled soup and swore at their incompetence. If he noticed Marasi, he didn't show it, instead wiping his hands on a cloth and demanding to see the produce the delivery boys had brought that morning.

Eventually, Marasi strolled into the kitchen, dodging a short assistant chef bearing a pot almost as big as she was, and stepped up to Wayne.

“I’ve seen crisper lettuce in the garbage heap!” he was saying to a cringing delivery boy. “And you call these grapes? These are so overripe, they’re practically fermenting! And—oh, ’ello, Marasi.” He said the last line in his normal, jovial voice.

The delivery boy scrambled away.

“What are you doing?” Marasi asked.

“Makin’ soup,” Wayne said, holding up a wooden spoon to show her. Nearby, several of the assistant cooks stopped in place, looking at him with shocked expressions.

“Out with you!” he said to them in the chef’s voice. “I must have time to prepare! Shoo, shoo, go!”

They scampered away, leaving him grinning.

“You do realize the wedding breakfast is canceled,” Marasi said, leaning back against a table.

“Sure do.”

“So why…”

She trailed off as he stuffed an entire tart in his mouth and grinned. “Hadda make sure they didn’t welch on their promif an’ not make anyfing to eat,” he said around chewing, crumbs cascading from his lips. “We paid for this stuff. Well, Wax did. ’Sides, wedding being canceled is no reason not to celebrate, right?”

“Depends on what you’re celebrating,” Marasi said, flipping open her notebook. “Bolts securing the water tower in place were definitely loosened. Road below was conspicuously empty, some ruffians—from another octant entirely, I might add—having stopped traffic by starting a fistfight in the middle of the rusting street.”

Wayne grunted, searching in a cupboard. “Hate that little notebook of yours sometimes.”

Marasi groaned, closing her eyes. “Someone could have been hurt, Wayne.”

“Now, that ain’t right at all. Someone *was* hurt. That fat fellow what has no hair.”

She massaged her temples. “You realize I’m a constable now, Wayne. I can’t turn a blind eye toward *wanton* property damage.”

“Ah, ’s not so bad,” Wayne said, still rummaging. “Wax’ll pay for it.”

“And if someone had been hurt? Seriously, I mean?”

Wayne kept searching. “The lads got a little carried away. ‘See that the church is flooded,’ I told them. Meant for the priest to open the place in the morning and find his plumbing had gotten a little case of the ‘being all busted up and leaking all over the rusting place.’ But the lads, they got a little excited is all.”

“The ‘lads’?”

“Just some friends.”

“Saboteurs.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “You think they could pronounce that?”

“Wayne…”

“I slapped ’em around already, Marasi,” Wayne said. “Promise I did.”

“He’s going to figure it out,” Marasi said. “What will you do then?”

“Nah, you’re wrong,” Wayne said, finally coming out of the cupboard with a large glass jug. “Wax has a blind spot for things like this. In the back of his noggin, he’ll be relieved that I stopped the wedding. He’ll figure it was me, deep in his subcontinence, and will pay for the damages—no matter what the assessor says. And he won’t say anything, won’t even investigate. Watch.”

“I don’t know.…”

Wayne hopped up onto the kitchen counter, then patted the spot beside him. She regarded him for a moment, then sighed and settled onto the counter there.

He offered her the jug.

“That’s cooking sherry, Wayne.”

“Yeah,” he said, “pubs don’t serve anything this hour but beer. A fellow has to get creative.”

"I'm sure we could find some wine around—"

He took a swig.

"Never mind," Marasi said.

He lowered the jug and pulled off his chef's hat, tossing it onto the counter. "What're you so uptight for today, anyway? I figured you'd be whooping for joy and runnin' around the street pickin' flowers and stuff. He's not marrying her. Not yet, anyway. You still got a chance."

"I don't *want* a chance, Wayne. He's made his decision."

"Now, what kinda talk is that?" he demanded. "You've given up? Is that how the Ascendant Warrior was? Huh?"

"No, in fact," Marasi said. "She walked up to the man she wanted, slapped the book out of his hand, and kissed him."

"See, there's how it is!"

"Though the Ascendant Warrior also went on and murdered the woman Elend was planning to marry."

"What, really?"

"Yeah."

"Gruesome," Wayne said in an approving tone, then took another swig of sherry.

"That's not the half of it," Marasi said, leaning back on the counter, hands behind her. "You want gruesome? She also supposedly ripped out the Lord Ruler's insides. I've seen it depicted in several illuminated manuscripts."

"Kind of graphic for a religious-type story."

"Actually, they're all like that. I think they have to put in lots of exciting bits to make people read the rest."

"Huh." He seemed disbelieving.

"Wayne, haven't you ever *read* any religious texts?"

"Sure I have."

"Really?"

"Yeah, lots of the things I read have religious texts in them. 'Damn.' 'Hell.' 'Flatulent, arse-licking git.'"

She gave him a flat stare.

"That last one is in the Testimony of Hammond. Promise. Least, all the letters are." Another swig. Wayne could outdrink anyone she knew. Of course, that was mostly because he could tap his metalmind, heal himself, and burn away the alcohol's effects in an eyeblink—then start over.

"Here now," he continued, "that's what you've gotta do. Be like the Lady Mistborn. Get your murderin' on, see. Don't back down. He should be yours, and you gotta let people know."

"My … murderin' on?"

"Sure."

"Against my sister."

"You could be polite about it," Wayne said. "Like, give her the first stab or whatnot."

"No, thank you."

"It doesn't have to be *real* murderin', Marasi," Wayne said, hopping off the counter. "It can be figurative and all. But you should *fight*. Don't let him marry her."

Marasi leaned her head back, looking up at the set of ladles swinging above the counter. "I'm not the Ascendant Warrior, Wayne," she said. "And I don't particularly care to be. I don't want someone I have to convince, someone I have to rope into submission. That sort of thing is for the courtroom, not the bedroom."

"Now, see, I think some people would say—"

"Careful."

"—that's a right enlightened way to think of things." He took a swig of sherry.

"I'm not some tortured, abandoned creature, Wayne," Marasi said, finding herself smiling at her distorted reflection in a ladle. "I'm not sitting around pining and dreaming for someone else to decide if I should be happy. There's nothing there. Whether that's due to actual lack of affection on his part, or more to stubbornness, I don't care. I've moved on."

She looked down, meeting Wayne's eyes. He cocked his head. "Huh. You're serious, aren't you?"

“Damn right.”

“Moved on…” he said. “Rusted nuts! You can *do* that?”

“Certainly.”

“Huh. You think … I should … you know … Ranette…”

“Wayne, if ever someone should have taken a hint, it was you. Yes. Move on. Really.”

“Oh, I took the hint,” he said, taking a swig of sherry. “Just can’t remember which jacket I left it in.” He looked down at the jug. “You sure?”

“She has a *girl*friend, Wayne.”

“’S only a phase,” he mumbled. “One what lasted fifteen years.…” He set the jug down, then sighed and reached into the cupboard from before, taking out a bottle of wine.

“Oh, for *Preservation’s* sake,” Marasi said. “That was in there all along?”

“Tastes better iffen you drink something what tastes like dishwater first,” Wayne said, then pulled the cork out with his teeth, which *was* kind of impressive, she had to admit. He poured her a cup, then one for himself. “To moving on?” he asked.

“Sure. To moving on.” She raised her cup, and saw reflected in the wine someone standing behind her.

She gasped, spinning, reaching for her purse. Wayne just raised his cup to the newcomer, who rounded the counter with a slow step. It was the man in the brown suit and bow tie. No, not the man. The *kandra*.

“If you’re here to persuade me to persuade him,” Wayne said, “you should know that he doesn’t ever listen to me unless he’s pretty drunk at the time.” He downed the wine. “’S probably why he’s lived so long.”

“Actually,” the kandra said, “I’m not here for you.” He turned to Marasi, then tipped his head. “My first choice for this endeavor has rejected my request. I hope you don’t take offense at being my second.”

Marasi found her heart thumping quickly. “What do you want?”

The kandra smiled broadly. “Tell me, Miss Colms. What do you know about the nature of Investiture and Identity?”

3

Wax, at least, had a change of clothing that wasn't wet—the suit he had worn on the raid. So he was pleasantly dry as his carriage pulled up to Ladrian Mansion. Steris had returned to her father's house to recover.

Wax put aside his broadsheet and waited for Cob, the new coachman, to hop down and yank open the carriage door. There was a frantic eagerness to the little man's motions, as if he knew that Wax only used a coach for propriety's sake. Leaping home on lines of steel would have been far faster, but just as a lord couldn't walk everywhere, Steelpushing around town too much in the daytime when not chasing criminals made members of his house uncomfortable. It simply wasn't what a house lord did.

Wax nodded to Cob and handed him the broadsheet. Cob grinned; he loved the things. "Take the rest of the day off," Wax told him. "I know you were looking forward to the wedding festivities."

Cob's grin widened, then he bobbed his head and climbed back onto the coach to see it, and the horses, cared for before leaving. He'd likely spend the day at the races.

Wax sighed, climbing the steps to the mansion. It was one of the finest in the city—luxurious with carved stonework and deep hardwood, with tasteful marble accents. That didn't stop it from being a prison. It was just a very nice one.

Wax didn't enter. Instead, he stood on the steps for a while before turning around and sitting on them. Closing his eyes, he let it all settle on him.

He was good at hiding his scars. He'd been shot almost a dozen times now, a few of those wounds quite bad. Out in the Roughs, he'd learned to pick himself up and keep on going, no matter what happened.

At the same time, it felt like things back then had been simple. Not always easy, but simple. And some scars continued to ache. Seemed to get worse with time.

He rose with a groan, leg stiff, and continued up the steps. Nobody opened the door for him or took his coat as he entered. He maintained a small staff in the house, but only what he considered necessary. Too many servants, and they'd hover and worry when he did anything on his own. It was as if the idea of him being capable drove them into feeling vestigial.…

Wax frowned, then slipped Vindication from his hip holster and raised her beside his head. He couldn't say, precisely, what had set him off. Footsteps up above, when he'd given the housekeepers the day off. A cup on a side table with a bit of wine in the bottom.

He flicked a little vial from his belt and downed the contents: steel flakes suspended in whiskey. The metal burned a familiar warmth inside of him, radiating from his stomach, and blue lines sprang into existence around him. They moved with him as he crept forward, as if he were tied with a thousand tiny threads.

He leaped and Pushed on the inlays in the marble floor, soaring up alongside the stairs to the second-story viewing balcony above the grand entryway. He slipped easily over the banister, landing with gun at the ready. The door to his study quivered, then opened.

Wax tiptoed forward.

“Just a moment, I—” The man in the light brown suit froze as he found Wax’s gun pressed against his temple.

“You,” Wax said.

“I’m quite fond of this skull,” the kandra remarked. “It’s sixth-century anteverdant, the head of a metal merchant from Urteau whose grave was shifted and protected as a side effect of Harmony’s rebuilding. An antique, if you will. If you make a hole in it, I’ll be *rather* put out.”

“I told you I wasn’t interested,” Wax growled.

“Yes. I took that to heart, Lord Ladrian.”

“Then why are you here?”

“Because I was invited,” the kandra said. He reached up and grasped the barrel of Wax’s gun between two fingers, then pushed it gently to the side. “We needed a place to converse. Your associate suggested it, as—I’m told—the servants are away.”

“My associate?” At that point, he heard laughter from ahead. “Wayne.” He eyed the kandra, then sighed and slipped his gun into its holster. “Which one are you? TenSoon, is that you?”

“Me?” the kandra asked, laughing. “TenSoon? What, do you hear me panting?” He chuckled, gesturing for Wax to enter his own study, as if he were doing Wax some grand courtesy. “I am VenDell, of the Sixth. Pleased to meet you, Lord Ladrian. If you must shoot me, please do it in the left leg, as I’ve no particular fondness for those bones.”

“I’m not going to shoot you,” Wax said, shoving past the kandra and entering the room. The blinds had been drawn and the thick curtains left to droop down, plunging the room into almost complete darkness, save for two small new electric lamps. Why the closed curtains? Was the kandra that concerned about being seen?

Wayne lounged in Wax’s easy chair, feet up on the cocktail table, helping himself to a bowl of walnuts. A woman stretched out in a similar posture in the companion chair, wearing tight trousers and a loose blouse, eyes closed as she leaned back in the chair, hands behind her head. She wore a different body from last time Wax had seen her, but the posture—and the height—gave him good clues that this was MeLaan.

Marasi was inspecting some odd equipment set up on a pedestal at the back of the room. It was a box with small lenses on the front. She stood up straight as soon as she saw him, and—being Marasi—blushed deeply.

“Sorry about this,” she said. “We were going to go to my flat to talk, but Wayne insisted.…”

“Needed some nuts,” Wayne said around a mouthful of walnuts. “When you invited me to stay here, you *did* say to make myself at home, mate.”

“I’m still unclear as to why you *needed* a place to talk,” Wax said. “I said I wasn’t going to help.”

“Quite so,” VenDell said from the doorway. “As you were unavailable, of necessity I turned to other options. Lady Colms has been so kind as to listen to my proposition.”

“Marasi?” Wax asked. “You went to Marasi?”

“What?” VenDell asked. “That’s surprising to you? She *was* instrumental in the defeat of Miles Hundredlives. Not to mention her help during the riots Paalm instigated.”

Wax looked at the kandra. “You’re trying to get to me through another route, aren’t you?”

“Look who’s full of himself,” MeLaan said from her chair.

“He’s always full of himself,” Wayne said, cracking a walnut. “Mostly on account of him eatin’ his own fingernails. I seen him do it.”

“Is it so ridiculous,” Marasi said, “that they’d actually want my help?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way,” Wax said, turning to her.

“Then what way *did* you mean it?”

Wax sighed. “I don’t know, Marasi. It’s been a long day. I got shot at, got a water tower dumped on my head, and had my wedding fall apart. Now Wayne is dropping broken walnut shells all over my chair. Honestly, I think I just need a drink.”

He walked toward the bar at the back of the room. Marasi eyed him, and as he passed, she muttered, “Will you get me one too? Because this is all making me go a little crazy."

He smiled, digging out some single-malt whiskey, pouring for himself and for Marasi. VenDell disappeared out the door, but returned a few minutes later with some piece of equipment that he hooked to the strange device. He ran a wire from the device to one of the wall lamps, pulling out the bulb and screwing in the end of the wire instead.

Leaving would feel childish, so Wax leaned against the wall and sipped his whiskey, saying nothing as VenDell turned on his machine. An image appeared on the wall.

Wax froze. It was a *picture,* similar to an evanotype—only on the wall and quite large. It displayed the Field of Rebirth in the center of Elendel, where the tombs of Vin and Elend Venture were to be found. He'd never seen anything like that image. It seemed to have been created entirely by light.

Marasi gasped.

Wayne threw a walnut at it.

"What?" he said as the others glared at him. "Wanted to see if it was real." He hesitated, then threw another walnut. The nut made a shadow on the image where it moved between the device and the wall. So it *was* light.

"Image projector," VenDell said. "They call it an evanoscope. By next year these will be commonplace, I should think." He paused. "Harmony implies that if we find this wondrous, it will *really* burn our metals when the images start moving."

"Moving?" Wax said, stepping forward. "How would they do that?"

"We don't know," MeLaan said with a grimace. "He accidentally let it slip, but won't say anything more."

"How does God," Marasi asked, still staring at the image, "*accidentally* let something slip?"

"As I said," VenDell said, "He has been distracted lately. We've tried to tease out more regarding moving images, but so far no luck. He's often like this—says it's vital that we discover things on our own."

“Like a chick breaking out of its shell,” MeLaan said. “He says that if we don’t struggle and learn on our own, we won’t be strong enough to survive what is coming.”

She left the words hanging in the room, and Wax shared a look with Marasi.

“Well…” Marasi said slowly, “*that’s* ominous. Has He said anything more about Trell?”

Wax folded his arms. Trell. It was a god from the old records, long before the Catacendre—indeed, long before the Lord Ruler. Harmony had memorized this religion, with many others, during his days as a mortal.

Marasi had an obsession with the god, and one that was not unwarranted. Wax wasn’t certain whether her claim was true or not that the worship of Trell was involved in what had happened to Lessie, but the spikes they’d discovered … they didn’t seem to have been made of any metal known to man.

The kandra had confiscated those. Wax had been so deep in his sorrows that by the time he’d started to recover, they’d already been taken.

“No,” VenDell said. “And I have no update on the spikes, if that’s what you’re wondering. But this task I have for you, Miss Colms, might provide insight. Suffice it to say, we’re worried about the possible intrusion of another god upon this domain.”

“Hey,” MeLaan said, “what’s a girl gotta do to get some of that whiskey?”

“Sister,” VenDell said, twisting something on his machine, making the image brighter, “you are a representative of Harmony and His enlightenment.”

“Yup,” MeLaan said, “and I’m a tragically *sober* one.”

Wax brought her a glass, and she grinned at him in thanks.

“Chivalry,” she said, raising it.

“Manipulation,” VenDell said. “Miss Colms, I spoke to you earlier of Investiture and Identity. I promised you an explanation. Here.” He flipped something on his machine, changing the image on the wall to a list of

Feruchemical metals, their attributes, and their natures. It wasn't the pretty, artistic rendition that Wax often saw in popular lore—it was far less fancy, but much more detailed.

"The basic physical abilities of Feruchemy are well understood," VenDell said, walking forward and using a long reed to point at a section of the projected chart. "Terris tradition and heritage has explored them for at least fifteen hundred years. Harmony left detailed explanations in the Words of Founding.

"Likewise, the abilities in the so-called mental quadrant of the chart have been outlined and discussed, tested and defined. Our understanding doesn't reach as far here—we don't know why memories stored in a metalmind degrade the way they do when removed, or why tapping mental speed tends to make one hungry, of all things—but still, we have a great deal of experience in this area."

He paused, and circled his pointer around a group of metals and abilities at the bottom: Fortune, Investiture, Identity, and Connection. Wax leaned forward. They'd spoken of these during his year living in the Village, but only as part of the catechisms of Feruchemy and Terris belief. None of those specified what the powers actually *did*. They were considered beyond understanding, like God, or time.

"Chromium," VenDell said, "nicrosil, aluminum, duralumin. These aren't metals that most ancients knew. Only in recent times have modern metallurgical processes allowed them to become commonplace."

"Commonplace?" Wayne said. "With a single aluminum bullet, mate, I could buy you an outfit that don't look so stupid *and* have money left over for a nice hat or two."

"Be that as it may," VenDell said, "compared to the amount of aluminum in the world before the Catacendre, the metal *is* now common. Bauxite refining, modern chemical processes, these have given us access to metals on a level that was never before possible. Why, the Last Obligator's autobiography explains that early aluminum was harvested from the inside of the Ashmounts!"

Wax stepped forward along the cone of light emanating from the machine. “So what do they do?”

“Research is ongoing,” VenDell said. “Ferrings with these abilities are very, very rare—and it is only in the last few decades that we’ve had access to enough of these metals to begin experimenting. Rebuilding society has been a … wearisome process.”

“You were alive before,” Marasi said. “In the days of the Ascendant Warrior.”

VenDell turned, raising his eyebrows. “Indeed, though I never met her. Only TenSoon did.”

“What was life like?” Marasi asked.

“Hard,” VenDell said. “It was … hard.”

“There are holes in our memories,” MeLaan added softly. “From when our spikes were removed. It took a piece out of us. There are things we’ll never get back.”

Wax took a drink. There was a *weight* that came from speaking to the kandra, in realizing that most of them had already been alive for hundreds of years when the World of Ash had ended. These were *ancient* beings. Perhaps Wax should not be surprised by their presumption. To them, he—indeed, everyone else alive—was little more than a child.

“Identity,” VenDell said, slapping his reed against the wall, casting a shadow on the image. “Lord Ladrian, could another Feruchemist use your metalminds?”

“Of course not,” Wax said. “Everyone knows that.”

“Why?”

“Well … because. They’re mine.”

Feruchemy was simple, elegant. Fill your metalmind with an attribute for an hour—like Wax’s weight, or Wayne’s health and healing—and you could draw out an hour’s worth of that attribute later on. Alternatively, you could draw out a burst of power that was extremely intense but lasted only a moment.

“The raw power of both Allomancy and Feruchemy,” VenDell said, “is something we call Investiture. This is very important, as in Feruchemy, an individual’s Investiture is keyed specifically to them. To what we call Identity.”

“You’ve made me curious,” Wax said, looking at the wall as VenDell leisurely walked back to his machine. “How does it know? My metalminds … do they *recognize* me?”

“After a fashion,” VenDell said, changing the image to one of a Feruchemist tapping strength. The woman’s muscles had grown to several times their normal size as she lifted a horse above her head. “Each man or woman has a Spiritual aspect, a piece of themselves that exists in another Realm entirely. You might call it your soul. Your Investiture is keyed to your soul—indeed, it might be a *part* of your soul, much as your blood is a part of your body.”

“So if a person could store their Identity,” Marasi said, “as Waxillium does with his weight…”

“They’d be without it for a time,” VenDell said. “A blank slate, so to speak.”

“So they could use *anyone’s* metalmind?” Marasi asked.

“Possibly,” VenDell said. He cycled through pictures of several more Feruchemists using their abilities before coming to rest on an image of a set of bracers. Simple metal bands, like wide bracelets, meant to be worn on the upper arms beneath clothing. It was impossible to tell the type of metal without color, but they had ancient Terris markings engraved on them.

“Some have been experimenting with your idea,” VenDell said, “and early results are promising. However, having a Feruchemist who can use anyone’s metalminds is intriguing, but not particularly life-changing. Our society is strewn with individuals who have extraordinary abilities—this would simply be one more variety. No, what interests me is the *opposite*, Miss Colms. What if a Feruchemist were to divest himself of all Identity, then fill *another* metalmind with an attribute. Say, strength. What would it do?”

“Create an unkeyed metalmind?” Marasi asked. “One that another Feruchemist could access?”

“Possibly,” VenDell said. “Or is there another possibility? Most people living right now have at least some Feruchemist blood in them. Could it be that such a metalmind as I describe, one that is keyed to no single individual, might be usable by *anyone*?”

Understanding settled on Wax like a slowly burned metal. From the chair beside the image device, Wayne whistled slowly.

“Anyone could be a Feruchemist,” Wax said.

VenDell nodded. “Investiture—the innate ability to burn metals or tap metalminds—is also one of the things Feruchemy can store. Lord Waxillium … these are arts we are only beginning to comprehend. But the secrets they contain could change the world.

“In the ancient days, the Last Emperor discovered a metal that transformed him into a Mistborn. A metal anyone could burn, it is said. This whispers of a hidden possibility, something lesser, but still incredible. What if one could somehow manipulate Identity and Investiture to create a set of bracers which imparted Feruchemical *or* Allomantic ability upon the person wearing them? One could make any person a Mistborn, or a Feruchemist, or *both at once*.”

The room fell silent.

A walnut bounced off VenDell’s head.

He immediately turned to glare at Wayne.

“Sorry,” Wayne said. “Just had trouble believing someone could be so melodramatic, so I figured you might not be real. Hadda check, ya know?”

VenDell rubbed his forehead, breathing out sharply in annoyance.

“This is all fascinating,” Wax admitted. “But unfortunately, it’s also impossible.”

“And why is that?” VenDell asked.

“You don’t even know how, or if, this would work,” Wax said, waving toward the screen. “And even if you could figure it out, you’d need a Full Feruchemist. Someone with at least *two* Feruchemical powers, as they’d need to be able to store their Identity in a metalmind along with another Feruchemical attribute. Rusts! To do what you proposed a moment ago, and create Allomancers too, you'd basically need someone who was already both Mistborn and Full Feruchemist."

"This is true," VenDell said.

"And how long has it been since a Full Feruchemist was born?"

"A very, very long time," VenDell said. "But, being *born* a Feruchemist isn't the only way to make this happen."

Wax hesitated, then shared a look with Marasi. She nodded, and he strode across the room to pull back the wooden panel hiding his wall safe. He did the combination and removed the book that Ironeyes had sent him. He turned, raising it. "Hemalurgy? Harmony hates it. I've *read* what the Lord Mistborn had to say on the topic."

"Yes," VenDell said. "Hemalurgy is … problematic."

"In part because we wouldn't exist without it," MeLaan said. "That's not a particularly fun thing to know—that people had to be murdered in order to bring you to sapience."

"Creating new spikes is a horrid practice," VenDell agreed. "We have no intentions of doing such a thing to experiment with Identity. Instead, we're waiting. A Full Feruchemist is bound to be born among mankind eventually—particularly with the Terris elite working so hard to preserve and condense their bloodlines. Unfortunately, our … restraint will not be shared by everyone. There are those who are growing very close to understanding how all this works."

My uncle, Wax thought, looking down at the book in his fingers. So far as he could tell, Edwarn—the man known as Mister Suit—was trying to breed Allomancers. What would he do with Hemalurgy, if he knew about it?

"We need to stay ahead of those who might use this for ill purposes," VenDell said. "We need to experiment and determine how these Identity-free metalminds would work."

"Doing so will be dangerous," Wax said. "Mixing the powers is *incredibly* dangerous."

“Says the Twinborn,” MeLaan said.

“I’m safe,” Wax said, glancing at her. “My powers don’t compound—they’re from different metals.”

“They may not compound,” VenDell said, “but they’re still fascinating, Lord Waxillium. *Any* mixing of Allomancy and Feruchemy has unanticipated effects.”

“What is it about you,” Wax said, “that makes me want to punch you, even when you’re saying something helpful?”

“None of us have been able to figure it out,” MeLaan said, waving for Wayne to toss her a walnut. “One of the cosmere’s great mysteries.”

“Now, now, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said, holding up his hands. “Is that the way to speak to someone who bears your ancestor’s hands?”

“His … hands?” Wax said. “Are you speaking metaphorically?”

“Ah, no,” VenDell said. “Breeze *did* say I could have them after he died. Excellent metacarpals. I bring them out for special occasions.”

Wax stood still for a moment, holding the book in his hand, trying to digest what the kandra had just said. His ancestor, the first Lord Ladrian, Counselor of Gods … had given this creature his hands.

In a way, Wax had shaken hands with Breeze’s corpse. He stared at his glass, surprised to find it empty, and poured some more whiskey.

“This has been a very enlightening lesson,” Marasi said. “But pardon, Your Holiness, you still haven’t explained what you need from me.”

VenDell changed the picture to one of an illustration. A man with long dark hair and a bare chest, wearing a cloak that extended behind him into eternity. His arms, crossed before him, were wrapped with intricate bracers in a fanciful design. Wax recognized the iconography, if not the specific image. Rashek. The First Emperor.

The Lord Ruler.

“What do you know of the Bands of Mourning, Miss Colms?” VenDell asked.

“The Lord Ruler’s metalminds,” Marasi said with a shrug. “Relics from mythology, like the Lady Mistborn’s knives, or the Lance of the Fountains.”

“There are four individuals,” VenDell said, “who, to our knowledge, have held the power of Ascension. Rashek, the Survivor, the Ascendant Warrior, and Lord Harmony Himself. Harmony’s Ascension granted Him a precise and in-depth knowledge of the Metallic Arts. It stands to reason that the Lord Ruler gained the same information. He understood Identity as a Feruchemical ability, and knew the hidden metals. Indeed, he gave aluminum to his Inquisitors.”

VenDell flipped the image to a more detailed illustration of those arms wrapped in bands of metal. “Curiously, nobody knows exactly what happened to the Bands of Mourning. Back when the Lord Ruler fell, TenSoon had not yet joined the Ascendant Warrior, and though he swears he heard them mentioned, the holes in his memory prevent him from saying how or when.

“The mythology surrounding the Bands is *quite* extensive. You can find myths about them dating back to before the Catacendre, and you can find someone telling new ones in a pub around the corner, invented on the spot for your amusement. But a theme runs through them all—if you held the Lord Ruler’s bracers, you supposedly gained his powers.”

“That’s just fancy,” Wax said. “It’s a natural thing to wish for, to make stories about. It doesn’t mean anything.”

“Doesn’t it?” VenDell asked. “Lore says the Bands have the *very power* that science has only now determined is plausible to assemble?”

“Coincidence,” Wax said. “And just because he *might* have created something doesn’t mean he did, and just because you *think* Identity works like you say, doesn’t mean you’re right. Besides, the Bands would have been destroyed when Harmony remade the world. And that’s not even considering that it would be foolish for the Lord Ruler to create weapons someone else could use against him.”

VenDell clicked his machine. The image changed to another evanotype, this one of a mural on a wall. It depicted a room with a central dais in the shape of a truncated pyramid. Set upon a pedestal on the dais was a pair of bracers made of delicate, curling metal, shaped in spirals.

Only a mural. But it did seem like it was depicting the Bands of Mourning.

"What is that?" Marasi asked.

"One of our brothers," MeLaan said, sitting up in her chair, "a kandra named ReLuur, took this image."

"The Bands of Mourning fascinated him," VenDell said. "ReLuur spent the last two centuries chasing them. He recently returned to Elendel bearing an evanotype camera in his pack and these pictures." VenDell clicked to the next image, a picture of a large metal plate set into a wall and inscribed with a strange script.

Wax narrowed his eyes. "I don't know that language."

"Nobody does," VenDell said. "It's completely alien to us, unrelated to any Terris, Imperial, or other root. Even the old languages in Harmony's records bear no resemblance to this script."

Wax felt a chill as the images continued. Another shot of the strange language. A statue that resembled the Lord Ruler, bearing a long spear. This appeared to be covered in frost. Another shot of the mural, more detailed, which depicted bracers with many different metals twining together. Not bracers for a Ferring like Wax, but bracers for a Full Feruchemist.

Only a mural, yes. But it was compelling.

"ReLuur believed in the Bands," VenDell said. "He claims to have seen them, though his camera bore no image of the actual relics. I'm inclined to trust his words."

VenDell showed another image, of a different mural. It depicted a man standing atop a peak, hands raised above him and a glowing spear hovering there, just beyond his touch. A corpse slumped at his feet. Wax went forward, walking into the stream of light until he was standing right in front of the image, looking up at the portion he wasn't blocking. The face of the man in the mosaic had eyes upturned and lips parted as if in awe at what he held.

He wore the bracers on his arms.

Wax turned around, but standing in the stream of light he couldn't see anything in the room. "You mean to tell me your brother, this ReLuur, actually *found* the Bands of Mourning?"

"He found something," VenDell said.

"Where?"

"He doesn't know," VenDell said softly.

Wax stepped out of the light, frowning. He looked from VenDell to MeLaan. "What?" he asked them.

"He's missing a spike," MeLaan said. "Best we could determine, he was accosted before he could return here from the mountains near the Southern Roughs."

"We can't get any straight answers out of him," VenDell said. "A kandra with a missing spike … well, they aren't quite sane any longer. As you well know."

Wax shivered, a pit of emptiness shifting inside him. "Yes."

"So, Miss Colms," VenDell said, stepping away from his machine. "This is where you come in. ReLuur was … is … one of our finest. Of the Third Generation, he is an explorer, an expert at bodies, and a genius. Losing him would be a great blow to us."

"We can't reproduce," MeLaan said. "Our numbers are set. The Thirds like ReLuur … they're our parents, our exemplars. Our leaders. He is precious."

"We would like you to recover his spike," VenDell said. "From whoever took it. This will restore his sanity, and hopefully his memories."

"The longer he goes without it, the bigger the holes will be," MeLaan said.

"So perhaps you can understand our urgency," VenDell said. "And why I found it prudent to interrupt Lord Ladrian, even on what was obviously an important day. When ReLuur returned to us, he was missing an entire arm and half his chest. Though he will not—or cannot—speak of where he got these pictures, he is able to recall being attacked in New Seran. We believe someone ambushed him there, on his return, and stole the artifacts he had discovered."

"They have his spike," MeLaan said, voice tense. "It's still there. It *has* to be."

"Wait, wait," Marasi said. "Why not give him another spike? You've got enough of them lying around to make earrings, like the one you gave Waxillium."

The two kandra looked at her as if she were mad, but Wax couldn't see why. He thought the question was an excellent one.

"You are misunderstanding the nature of these spikes," VenDell all but sputtered. "First, we do not have kandra Blessings 'lying around.' The earrings you mention are crafted from old Inquisitor spikes, and have barely any potency to them. One might have been good enough for Lord Waxillium's little stunt six months ago, but they would *hardly* be enough to restore a kandra."

"Yeah," MeLaan said. "If that worked, we'd have already used all those spikes to make new children. We can't; a kandra Blessing must be created very specifically."

"We *did* try something akin to what you suggest," VenDell admitted. "TenSoon … relinquished one of his own spikes to give our fallen brother a few moments of lucidity. It was very painful for TenSoon, and—unfortunately—accomplished nothing. ReLuur only screamed, begging for his spike. He spat out TenSoon's a moment later. Trying to use someone else's spikes when you don't have your own already can provoke radical changes in personality, memory, and temperament."

"Lessie," Wax said, voice hoarse. "She … she changed spikes frequently."

"And each was a spike created specifically for her," VenDell said. "Not one that had been used by another kandra. And besides, would you call her particularly stable, Lord Waxillium? You must trust us on this; we have done what we can. Here, at least.

“MeLaan will be traveling to New Seran to investigate and retrieve ReLuur’s missing spike. Miss Colms, we would like you to join her and help recover our brother’s mind. We can intervene with your superiors in the constable precinct, and make certain you are assigned field duty working for the government in a clandestine fashion. If you can restore ReLuur’s spike, we will be able to find answers.”

VenDell eyed Wax. “This will not be a wild hunt for some impossible artifact. All we want is our friend back. Of course, any clues you can discover regarding where he went on his quest, and where he got these pictures, would be appreciated. There are some people of interest in New Seran, nobility that ReLuur is fixated upon for reasons we can’t get out of him.”

Wax studied the last image for a time longer. It was tempting. Mystical artifacts were all well and good, but someone attacking—and nearly killing—one of the Faceless Immortals? *That* was interesting.

“I’ll go,” Marasi said from behind him. “I’ll do it. But … I wouldn’t mind help. Waxillium?”

A part of him longed to go. Escape the parties and the dances, the political engagements and business meetings. The kandra would know that; Harmony would know that.

Anger simmered deep within him at the thought. He’d hunted Lessie, and they *hadn’t told him*.

“This sounds like the perfect challenge for your skills, Marasi,” he found himself saying. “I doubt you need me. You are perfectly capable, and I feel a fool for having implied otherwise, even accidentally. If you do want company, however, perhaps Wayne would be willing to provide some extra protection. I’m afraid that I, however, must—”

The image on the wall flickered to a shot of a city with grand waterfalls. New Seran? He’d never been there. The streets were overgrown with foliage, and people promenaded about in clothing of striped brown suits and soft white dresses.

“Ah, I forgot,” VenDell said. “There *was* one other image in ReLuur’s belongings. We discovered it last, as the others were packed carefully away to await development. We suspect this image was taken in New Seran, just before the attack.”

“And why should I care?” Wax said. “It…”

He trailed off, feeling an icy shock as he recognized someone in the picture. He stepped back into the stream of light, pressing his hand against the white wall, trying—fruitlessly—to feel the image. “Impossible.”

She stood between two men who held to her arms tightly, as if pulling her forward against her will. Keeping her prisoner even in broad daylight. She had glanced over her shoulder toward the camera as the evanotype was taken. It must be one of the new models he’d been hearing about, that didn’t require the subject to stand still for the image to set.

The woman was in her forties, lean but solid, with long dark hair framing a face that—despite their years apart—Wax knew very, very well.

Telsin. His sister.

4

Two hours after the strange meeting, Wayne puttered through Wax's mansion, peeking behind pictures, lifting up vases. Where did he keep the *good* stuff?

"It *is* her, Steris," Wax was saying in the ground-floor sitting room not far away. "And that man with his back turned, holding her by the arm, that could be my uncle. They're involved in this. I *have* to go."

It had always seemed funny to Wayne how rich folk got to decide what was valuable. He inspected a picture frame that was likely pure gold. Why did anyone care about this shiny stuff? Gold could do some fun things with Feruchemy, but it was pure rubbish when it came to Allomancy.

Well, rich folk liked it. So they paid a lot for it, and that made it valuable. No other reason.

How did they decide what was valuable? Did they all just gather together, sit around in their suits and gowns, and say, "Oi. Let's start eatin' fish eggs, and make the stuff real expensive. That'll rust their brains, it will." Then they'd have a nice round of rich folks' laughter and throw some servants off the top of a building to see what kind of splats they'd make when they hit.

Wayne put the picture back. He refused to play by rich people's rules. He'd decide for himself what something was worth. And that frame was ugly. Didn't help none that Steris's cousins, who were depicted in the evanotype it held, looked like fish.

"Then you should most certainly go, Lord Waxillium," Steris said. "Why the concern? We can make arrangements to postpone other duties."

"It's infuriating, Steris!" Even from out in the hall, Wayne could hear the *I'm pacing* in his tone. "Not a word of apology, from them or Harmony regarding what they did to me. VenDell made offhanded comments—referring to me shooting Lessie as a 'stunt.' They *used* me. Lessie was only trying, in a broken way, to free me from them. Now they saunter back, no mention of what I lost, and expect me to just pick up and do their bidding again."

Poor Wax. That had busted him up right good, it had. And Wayne could see why. Still, an apology? Did people what got killed in a flood expect an apology from God? God did as God wished. You simply hoped to not get on His worse side. Kinda like the bouncer at the club with the pretty sister.

Harmony wasn't the only god, anyway. And that was what Wayne was about today.

After some silence, Wax continued, more softly. "I have to go. Even after what they did, if my uncle is really involved in this … if I can free Telsin … I have to go. Tomorrow night, there will be a gathering of the outer cities political elite in New Seran. Governor Aradel is rightly concerned, and was going to send a representative anyway. It gives me a plausible excuse to be in the city. Marasi can look for the lost spike; I can hunt down my uncle."

"It is decided, then," Steris said. "Will we be leaving immediately?"

Wax was silent for a moment. "We?"

"I assumed … I mean, if you are taking my sister, it would look very odd if I were not accompanying you." Wayne felt like he could hear her blush. "I don't mean to be presumptuous. You may, of course, do as you wish, but—"

"No," he said. "You're right. It would look odd to go alone. The gathering will include a reception, after all. I don't want to imply … I mean…"

"I can go, but stay out of your way."

"It could be dangerous. I can't ask it of you."

"If this is what you feel you must do, then I will be happy to take the risk."

"I…"

Rusts. Those two were as awkward as a man suddenly splitting his cheeks in church. Wayne shook his head, picking up one of the vases in the entryway. Good pottery, with a nice swirly-dirly pattern. Maybe that would do for his offering.

Someone knocked on the door, and Wayne put the vase back. It didn't feel right. He took one of the flowers though, and traded it for an extra sock from his back pocket. Huh. He had a silverware set in his other pocket. From the wedding breakfast? Yeah, that was right. They'd put out a place setting for him, had his name and everything. That meant the silverware had been his.

He put the fork, knife, and spoon back in his pocket and tucked the flower behind his ear, then walked to the door, reaching it right before that butler did. He gave the man a glare—it was only a matter of time before he cracked and tried to kill them all—then pulled open the door.

That kandra bloke stood on the other side. His suit now was an even *lighter* shade of tan. "You," Wayne said, pointing. "We just got ridda you!" It had only been … what, two hours since he left?

"Good afternoon, young lad," the kandra said. "Are the adults home?"

Darriance quite politely pushed Wayne aside and gestured for VenDell to enter. "You are expected, sir."

"He is?" Wayne said.

"Master Ladrian said to send you in," the butler said, pointing toward the sitting room.

"Thank you," VenDell said, striding toward the room.

Wayne caught up with him quickly.

"Nice flower," the kandra said. "Can I have your skeleton when you're dead?"

“My…” Wayne felt at his head.

“You’re a Bloodmaker, correct? Can heal yourself? Bloodmaker bones tend to be particularly interesting, as your time spent weak and sickly creates oddities in your joints and bones that can be quite distinctive. I’d love to have your skeleton. If you don’t mind.”

Taken aback by this request, Wayne stopped in place. Then he ran past him, pushing into the room where Wax and Steris were talking. “Wax,” he complained, pointing, “the immortal bloke is being creepy again.”

“Greetings, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said, walking in and holding up a folder. “Your tickets, along with transcripts of everything we’ve been able to pry out of ReLuur. I warn you, most of it isn’t terribly lucid.”

Wayne glanced at Wax’s liquor cabinet. Maybe something in there would work for what he needed for his offering.

“I haven’t said that I’d go,” Wax told the immortal. “You’re roping me into this, sure as sheep in a pen.”

“Yes,” the immortal said. He held out the folder again. “In here is a list of people ReLuur mentions. You’ll find it interesting that he lists several, including the woman holding the party I’m sending you to, as having had interactions with your uncle.”

Wax sighed, then accepted it. He gestured to Steris, who had risen to curtsy. “My fiancée. We were debating whether she should accompany me or not.”

“We have made provisions for whatever you decide,” VenDell said. “Though it *will* look less suspicious if you go too, Lady Harms, I cannot guarantee your safety.”

“It might be helpful if *you* accompanied us, VenDell,” Wax said. “We could use an extra Metalborn.”

VenDell’s eyes bulged, and he turned white, like he’d been told his baby had been born with two noses. “Go out into the field? *Me?* Lord Ladrian, I assure you, that’s not what you want.”

“Why not?” Wax asked, leaning back against the wall. “You’re practically impossible to kill, and you can change your rusting shape into anything you want.”

“Wait,” Wayne said, turning away from the liquor cabinet. “You can turn into anything? Like a bunny?”

“Very small animals are extremely difficult, as we need a certain mass to hold our cognitive functions and—”

“Bunny,” Wayne said. “Can you be a *bunny*.”

“If absolutely necessary.”

“So *that’s* what that damn book was about.”

VenDell sighed, looking toward Wax. “MeLaan can perform any transformations you might need. *I* honor the First Contract, Lord Ladrian. Besides, the outside doesn’t suit me. There’s too much…” He waved his hands in front of him.

“Too much what?” Wax asked, frowning.

“*Everything*,” VenDell said—though Wayne didn’t miss that the rusting bunny glanced at him when he said it.

Wayne shook his head, trying the liquor cabinet. It was locked, unfortunately. What a fine heap of trust Wax showed in him.

“My sister will meet you at the station,” VenDell said. “Track seventeen, in four hours.”

“*Four hours?*” Steris said. “I need to send for the maids! And the valet! And…” She raised a hand to her head, looking faint. “And I need to make a *list*.”

“We’ll be there, VenDell,” Wax said.

“Excellent,” the kandra fellow said, fishing in his pocket. Wayne got interested, until he came out with a dull old bent earring, simple, old-style. “I brought you one of these.”

“No thanks.”

“But, if you need to—”

“*No thanks*,” Wax said.

The look between the two of them grew real uncomfortable, like each was accusing the other of having made an unpersonable stench of some sort.

“Good, good,” Wayne said, drifting toward the door. “Meet you all at the station.”

“Aren’t you going to pack?” Steris called after him.

“Sack’s in my room,” Wayne called back. “Under my bed. I’m always packed and ready to go, mate. Never can tell when a misunderstandin’ will crop up.” He turned away, popped his hat off the rack, flipped it onto his head, and ducked out the front door.

Leave them to their discussing and their arguing and their creepy immortal bunnies. He had things that needed to be done. Well, one thing at least.

Wayne had a *quest*.

He whistled as he danced down the steps. A simple tune, easy and familiar, with an accompanying beat playing in his mind. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick, energetic. He strolled down the street, but found himself less and less pleased with his flower. It was not the proper offering for the god with whom he must meet. Too obvious, too soft.

He spun it in his fingers, thoughtful, softly whistling his tune. No better ideas came to him. This area was too fancy, with mansions and gardens and men clipping hedges. The streets didn’t even stink of horse dung. It was hard to think in a place like this; everyone knew the *best* thinking happened in alleyways and slums. Places where the brain had to be alert, even panicked—where the bugger knew that if it didn’t perk up and get some geniusing done, you were likely to get yourself stabbed, and then where would it be?

Holding your brain hostage against your own stupidity—*that* was how to get stuff done. Wayne made his way to a nearby canal, and searched out a gondola man who looked bored.

“My good man,” Wayne said to himself. “My *good* man.” Yeah, that was it. Speak like you couldn’t breathe right—high First Octant accent, with a little Terris stirred in. Rich accent. Very rich.

“You, boatman!” Wayne called, waving. “Hey! Oh, do hurry. I haven’t the time!”

The boatman poled over.

“Quickly now, quickly, my good man!” Wayne shouted. “Tell me. How much for the day?”

“The day?” the boatman said.

“Yes, yes,” Wayne said, hopping into the boat. “I have need of your services for the entire day.” Wayne settled himself without waiting for a response. “Onward, now. Up the Fourth-Fifth Canal, turn right around the Hub, then east up the Irongate. First stop is in the Third Octant. She’s counting on me, you know.”

“The whole day,” the boatman said, eager. “Yes, sir, um … my lord.…”

“Ladrian,” Wayne said. “Waxillium Ladrian. We aren’t moving. Why aren’t we moving?”

The boatman began poling, so gleeful at the prospect of many hours of employment that he forgot to ask for any money up front.

“Fifty,” the man finally said.

“Hmm?”

“Fifty. For the whole day.”

“Yes, yes, fine,” Wayne said. *Dirty thief,* he thought. *Trying to cheat an upstanding citizen, and a house lord at that, merely because he acted a little distracted?* What was this world coming to? When his grandfather Ladrian had been house lord, men had *known* how to be respectful. Why, a boatman in those days would have dunked himself in the canal before taking a wuzing more than he was due!

“If you don’t mind me asking, my lord,” the boatman said. “And I mean no offense … but your clothing.”

“Yes?” Wayne asked, straightening his Roughs coat.

“Is something wrong with it?”

“*Wrong* with it?” Wayne said, stuffing his accent so full of noble indignation it was practically bleeding. “Wrong with it? Man, do you not follow fashion?”

“I—”

“Thomton Delacour himself designed these clothes!” Wayne said. “Northern outlands inspiration. It’s the height, I tell you! The height. A

Coinshot couldn’t get higher!”

“Sorry. Sorry, my lord. I said I didn’t want to offend!”

“You can’t just *say* ‘don’t be offended’ and then say something offensive, man! That’s not how it works.” Wayne settled back, arms folded.

The boatman, wisely, said nothing more to him. After about ten minutes of travel, the time had arrived.

“Now,” Wayne said, as if to himself, “we’ll need to stop at Glimmering Point docks. And then a skid along Stansel Belt.”

He let his accent shift, a little of the Knobs—a slum—slipping in. Dull accent, like a mouth filled with cotton. The folks there used the word “skid” for practically anything. Distinctive word, that. Skiiiid. Sounded like it should be something dirty.

“Um, my lord?”

“Hm?” Wayne said. “Oh, just going over my errands. My nephew is getting married—you might have heard of the wedding, it’s all the talk of the city. So many errands. Yes indeed, the day will be quite the skid.”

That was a ruffian’s accent, but just a hint, like the lemon in a good hot toddy. He slipped it in under the highborn accent.

The boatman started to get uncomfortable. “You said the Stansel Belt? Not a nice area, that.”

“Need to hire some workers,” Wayne said absently.

The boatman continued poling, but he was nervous now. Tapping his foot, moving the pole more quickly, ignoring calls from colleagues they passed. Something was *wrong*. Like the scent of a meat pie left under the sofa for a few days. A whole day’s hiring? An outrageous sum? It might instead be a setup. Pretend to be a lord, then lure him into the slums to be robbed.…

“My lord!” the man said. “I just realized. Gotta get back. Can’t be hired for the whole day. My mother, she’ll need me.”

“What nonsense is this?” Wayne demanded. “I haven’t the time for your prattle, man! And catching another boat will waste my precious time. I’ll double your fee.”

Now, the man was *really* anxious. “Sorry, my lord,” he said, poling to the side of the canal. “Very sorry. Can’t do it.”

“At least take me to Stansel—”

“No!” the man yelped. “Nope, can’t do it. Gotta go.”

“Well,” Wayne huffed, climbing out. “I’ve never been treated in such a manner! And we’re not even halfway down portway!”

“Sorry, my lord!” the man said, poling away as quickly as he could. “Sorry!”

Wayne cocked his hat, grinned, and checked the sign hanging from the streetlamp. Exactly where he’d wanted to go, and not a clip paid. He started whistling and strolled along the canal, keeping an eye out for a better offering. What would the god want?

Maybe that? he wondered, eyeing a line of people waiting at Old Dent’s roadside cart, wanting to buy some of his fried potatoes. Seemed a good bet.

Wayne wandered over. “Need some help, Dent?”

The old man looked up and wiped his brow. “Five clips a small pouch, eight for a large, Wayne. And don’t eat none of the stock, or I’ll fry your fingers.”

Wayne grinned, slipping behind the cart as the man turned back to his brazier and stirred a batch that was frying. Wayne took the customers’ money—and didn’t eat much of the stock—until the last man in line arrived, a fancy-looking fellow in a doorman’s jacket. Probably worked at one of the hotels down the lane. Good tips at those jobs.

“Three large,” the man said.

Wayne got his potatoes, took the man’s money, then hesitated. “Actually,” Wayne said, holding up a note, “do you have change? We got too many large bills.”

“I suppose,” the man said, digging in his nice eelskin wallet.

“Great, here’s a twenty.”

“I’ve got two fives and ten ones,” the man said, putting them down.

“Thanks.” Wayne took them, then hesitated. “Actually, I’ve got plenty of ones. Could I get that ten I saw in your wallet?”

“Fine.”

Wayne gave him a handful of coins and took the ten.

“Hey,” the man said, “there are only seven here.”

“Whoops!” Wayne said.

“What are you doing, Wayne?” Old Dent said. “There’s more change in the box under there.”

“Really?” Wayne glanced. “Rusts. Okay, how about you just give me my twenty back?” He counted the man back thirteen and poured the coins and bills into his hand.

The man sighed, and gave Wayne the twenty. “Can I just get some sauce for my chips?”

“Sure, sure,” Wayne said, squeezing some sauce onto the pouches, beside the potatoes. “That’s a nice wallet. Whaddaya want for it?”

The man hesitated, looking at his wallet.

“I’ll give you this,” Wayne said, plucking the flower off his ear and holding it out with a banknote worth ten.

The man shrugged and handed over the empty wallet, taking the bill and stuffing it in his pocket. He threw the flower away. “Idiot,” the man said, marching off with his potatoes.

Wayne tossed the wallet up and caught it again.

“Did you shortchange that man, Wayne?” Old Dent asked.

“What’s that?”

“You got him to give you fifty, and you gave him back forty.”

“What?” Wayne said, stuffing the wallet in his back pocket. “You know I can’t count that high, Dent. ’Sides, gave him ten extra at the end.”

“For his wallet.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “The flower was for the wallet. The bill was ’cuz I somehow ended up with an extra ten completely on accident, very innocent-like.” He smiled, helped himself to a pouch of chips, and went wandering off.

That wallet was nice. His god would like that. Everyone needed wallets, right? He got it out and opened and closed it repeatedly, until he noticed that one side was worn.

Rusts. He'd been cheated! This wouldn't work at all for an offering. He shook his head, walking along the canal promenade. A pair of urchins sat on one side, hands out for coins. The melancholy sound of a busker rose from a little farther down the path. Wayne was near the Breakouts, a nice slum, and he caught whiffs of their distinctive odor. Fortunately the aroma wafting from a nearby bakery overwhelmed most of it.

"Here's the thing," he said to one of the urchins, a girl not seven. He settled down on his haunches. "I ain't travailed enough."

"… Sir?" the girl asked.

"In the old stories of quests, you gotta *travail*. That's like traveling, but with an *ailment* stapled on. Headaches and the like; maybe a sore backside too."

"Can … can I have a coin, sir?"

"Ain't got no coins," Wayne said, thinking. "Damn. In the stories they always tip the urchins, don't they? Lets ya know they're the heroes and such. Hold here for a sec."

He stood up and burst into the bakery, real heroic-like. A woman behind the counter was just pulling a rack of meat buns out of the oven. Wayne slammed his fork down onto the plain wooden countertop, leaving it flourished there like a rusting legendary sword.

"How many buns'll you give me for this?" he asked.

The baker frowned, looking at him, then taking the fork. She turned it over in her fingers. "Mister," she said, "this is *silver*."

"So … how many?" Wayne asked.

"A bunch."

"A bunch'll do, fair merchant."

A moment later he emerged from the bakery holding three large paper sacks filled with a dozen buns each. He dropped a handful of change the baker had insisted on giving him into the urchins' hands, then held up a finger as their jaws dropped.

"You," he said, "must *earn* this."

"How, sir?"

"Take these," he said, dropping the sacks. "Go give the stuff inside away."

"To who?" the girl asked.

"Anyone who needs them," Wayne said. "But see here, now. Don't eat more than four yourselves, all right?"

"*Four?*" the girl said. "All for me?"

"Well, five, but you bargain hard. Little cheat." He left them stunned and danced along the edge of the canal, passing the busker, who sat strumming an old guitar.

"Something lively, minstrel!" Wayne called, tossing the silver spoon into the man's overturned hat, which awaited tips.

"Here now," the man said. "What's this?" He squinted. "A spoon?"

"Merchants are apparently desperate for the things!" Wayne called. "They'll give you half a hunnerd meat buns for one, with change to boot. Now, give me 'The Last Breath,' minstrel!"

The man shrugged, and started plucking the song from Wayne's mind. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick, energetic. Wayne rocked back and forth, eyes closed. *The end of an era*, he thought. *A god to be appeased.*

He heard the two urchins laughing, and opened his eyes to see them tossing meat buns at the people they passed. Wayne smiled, then kicked himself in a smooth skid along the edge of the canal, which was slippery with a coating of slime. He managed to go a good ten feet before losing his balance and slipping.

Which, of course, plunged him right into the canal.

Coughing, he pulled himself up onto the side. Well, maybe this would count as a travail. If not, it was probably poetry, considering what he'd done to Wax this morning.

He fished out his hat, then put his back to the canal. That was the way to go. Eyes forward, back turned toward the past. No sense getting your nose stuck in things that don't matter anymore. He continued on his way, trailing water and spinning the last of the silverware—the knife—in his fingers. This was *not* the right offering for his quest. He was pretty sure of it. But what was?

He stopped at the next canal bridge, then stepped back. A short man in a uniform he didn't recognize was walking down a nearby street with a little book in hand. Motorcars were parked here in various positions, most partly up onto the sidewalks. The man in the uniform stopped at each one, writing something down in his book.

Wayne followed after him. "Here now," he asked the man. "What're you doing?"

The little man in the uniform glanced at him, then back at his notebook. "New city ordinance about the parking of motorcars requires them to be left in an orderly manner, not up on the sidewalks like this."

"So…"

"So I'm writing down the registry numbers of each one," the man said. "And we'll track down the owners and charge them a fine."

Wayne whistled softly. "That's *evil*."

"Nonsense," the man said. "It's the law."

"So you're a conner?"

"Fine enforcement officer," the man said. "Spent most of my time inspecting kitchens before last month. This is a lot more productive, I'll tell you. It—"

"That's great," Wayne said. "Whaddaya want for the book?"

The man regarded him. "It's not for trade."

"I've got this here nice wallet," Wayne said, holding it up, water dripping out the side. "Recently cleaned."

"Move along, sir," the man said. "I am not—"

"How 'bout this?" Wayne said, yanking out the knife.

The man jumped back in alarm, dropping his notebook. Wayne snatched it, dropping the knife.

"Great trade. Thanks. Bye." He took off at a dash.

"Hey!" the man shouted, chasing after him. "Hey!"

“No tradebacks!” Wayne shouted, hand on his wet hat, running for all he was worth.

“Come back here!”

Wayne dashed out onto the main street along the canal, passing a couple of old men sitting on a tenement’s steps near the entrance to the slums.

“That’s Edip’s boy,” one of them said. “Always gettin’ himself into trouble, that one is.”

The man got hit in the face by a meat bun a second later.

Wayne ignored that, holding his hat to his head and running all-out. The conner was a determined one. Followed Wayne a good ten streets before slowing, then stopping, hands on his knees. Wayne grinned and ducked around one last corner before slamming his back against the bricks of a building, beside a window. He was pretty winded himself.

He’ll probably file a report, Wayne thought. *Hope the fine they make Wax pay ain’t too large.*

He ought to find something to bring back as an apology. Maybe Wax needed a wallet.

Wayne heard something beside him, and turned to see a woman with spectacles leaning out the window to look at him curiously. She was holding a pen, and just inside the window a half-finished letter lay on the desk in front of her. Perfect.

Wayne tipped his hat, snatching the pen from her hand. “Thanks,” he said, opening the notebook and scribbling some words. As she cried out, he tossed the pen back to her, then continued on his way.

The final destination, the god’s dwelling, was not far now. He veered down a street lined with trees and quaint smaller townhomes. He counted them off, then turned to the right and stood facing it. The god’s new temple. She’d moved here a few months ago.

He took a deep breath, banishing the music in his head. This had to be *quiet*. He crept carefully up the long walk to the front door. There, he quietly tucked the book into the spot between the doorknob and the door. He didn’t dare knock. Ranette was a jealous god, known for shooting people—for her, it was practically a governmental mandate. If the constables didn’t find a few corpses on her doorstep every week, they’d start to wonder if she wasn’t feeling well.

Wayne slipped away. He smiled, imagining Ranette’s reaction when she opened the door, and was so distracted that he almost ran right into *Ranette herself* walking up the path to her house.

Wayne stumbled back. Perfect brown hair, pulled back to expose a gorgeous face, weathered from her time in the Roughs. A fantastic figure, round in all the right places. Tall. Taller than Wayne. So he had something to look up to.

“Wayne! What were you doing at my door?”

“I—”

“Idiot,” she said, shoving past him. “You’d better not have broken in. Tell Wax I delivered those cords to him just now. He needn’t have sent someone to check on me.”

“Cords?” Wayne asked. What cords?

She ignored the question, muttering. “I swear, I *am* going to shoot you, you little maggot.”

He watched her go, smiled to himself, then turned and continued walking away.

“What’s this?” she said from behind him.

He kept walking.

“Wayne!” she shouted at him. “I’ll shoot you, right now. I swear I will. Tell me what you’ve done.”

He turned around. “It’s just a gift, Ranette.”

“A notebook?” she asked, flipping the pages.

He shoved his hands into his trouser pockets and shrugged. “Writin’ book,” he said. “You’re always writin’ stuff down, thinkin’ about things. Figured if there’s one thing you could always use more of, it’s a writin’ book. All those ideas you have must get pretty crowded up there. Makes sense you’d need places to store them.”

“Why’s it damp?”

“Sorry,” he said. “Forgot and stuck it in my pocket for a moment. But I got it right back out. I fought ten constables for that, I’ll have you know.”

She flipped through it, eyes narrowed in suspicion, until she reached the last page. “What’s this?” She held it up close and read the words he’d scrawled on the back page. “‘Thank you and goodbye’? What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothin’s wrong,” Wayne said. “I just figured it was time.”

“You’re leaving?”

“For a little, but that’s not what the words mean. I’m sure we’ll see each other again. Perhaps frequently and such. I’ll see you … but I won’t be *seein’* you again. See?”

She looked at him for a long moment, then seemed to relax. “You mean it?”

“Yeah.”

“Finally.”

“Gotta grow up sometime, right? I’ve found that … well, a man wantin’ something don’t make it true, you know?”

Ranette smiled. Seemed an awful long time since he’d seen her do that. She walked to him, and he didn’t even flinch when she extended her hand. He was proud of that.

He took her hand, and she raised his, then kissed it on the back. “Thank you, Wayne.”

He smiled, let go, and turned to leave. One step into it, though, he hesitated, then shifted his weight to his other foot and leaned toward her again. “Marasi says you’re courtin’ another girl.”

“… I am.”

Wayne nodded. “Now, I don’t want to go wrong, seein’ as I’m being so gentlemanly and grown-up and the like. But you can’t blame a man for gettin’ ideas when hearing something such as that. So … I don’t suppose that there’s a chance for the *three* of us to—”

“Wayne.”

"I don't mind none if she's fat, Ranette. I likes a girl what has something to hold on to."

"Wayne."

He looked back at her, noting the storm in her expression. "Right," he said. "Right. Okay. Yeah. I don't suppose, when we're lookin' fondly on this conversationalizing and our memorable farewell, we could both just forget I said that last part?"

"I'll do my best."

He smiled, took off his hat, and gave her a deep bow he'd learned off a sixth-generation doorman greeter at Lady ZoBell's ballroom in the Fourth Octant. Then he stood up straight, replaced his hat, and put his back toward her. He found himself whistling as he went on his way.

"What is that song?" she called after him. "I know it."

"'The Last Breath,'" he said without turning back. "The pianoforte was playin' it when we first met."

He turned the corner, and didn't look back. Didn't even check if she'd sighted on him with a rifle or something. Feeling a spring in his step, he made his way to the nearest busy intersection and tossed the empty wallet into the gutter. It wasn't long before a carriage-for-hire pulled up, and its coachman glanced to the side, saw the wallet, and scrambled down to grab it.

Dashing out from an alley, Wayne beat the man to it, diving for the wallet and rolling on the ground. "It's mine!" he said. "I seen it first!"

"Nonsense," the coachman said, swatting Wayne with his horse reed. "I dropped it, you ruffian. It's mine!"

"Oh, is that so?" Wayne said. "How much is innit?"

"I need not answer to you."

Wayne grinned, holding up the wallet. "I tells you what. You can have it and everything that's inside. But you take me to the Fourth Octant west train station."

The coachman eyed him, then held out his hand.

Half an hour later, the coach rolled up to the rail station—a bleak-looking building with peaked towers and tiny windows, as if to taunt those trapped inside with a scant view of the sky. Wayne sat on the back footman's stand, legs swinging over the side. Trains steamed nearby, rolling up to platforms to gorge themselves on a new round of passengers.

Wayne hopped down, tipped his hat to the grumbling coachman—who seemed well aware he'd been had—and strolled in through the open doors. He shoved his hands in his pockets and looked about until he found Wax, Marasi, and Steris standing amid a small hill of suitcases, with servants waiting at the ready to carry them.

"Finally!" Wax snapped. "Wayne, our train is nearly boarding. Where have you been?"

"Makin' an offering to a beautiful god," Wayne said, looking up toward the building's high ceiling. "Why do you suppose they made this place so big? Ain't like the trains ever come in here, eh?"

"Wayne?" Steris asked, wrinkling her nose. "Are you drunk?"

He put a bit of a slur into his speech. "Course not. Why … why'd I be drunk at this hour?" He looked at her lazily.

"You're insufferable," she said, waving to her lady's maid. "I can't believe you risked being late for a little liquor."

"Wasn't a *little,*" Wayne said.

When the train arrived, he joined the others in climbing aboard—Steris and Wax had ordered an entire *car* set aside for the lot of them. Unfortunately, the last-minute hiring meant it had to be hitched all the way at the back, and Wayne had to share a room with Herve the footman. Bugger that. He knew for a fact the man snored. He'd find someplace else to sleep, or else just stay up. The train to New Seran wasn't going to take *that* long. They'd arrive before sunrise.

In fact, as the thing finally started to chug into motion, he swung out his compartment's window—much to Herve's consternation—and climbed up onto the roof. He sat there whistling softly, watching Elendel pass for a time, wind ruffling his hair. A simple tune, easy and familiar, and the accompanying beat played on the tracks below. Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Quick … energetic.

He lay down then, staring at the sky, the clouds, the sun.
Eyes forward, back turned toward the past.

PART TWO

5

Watching the passing scenes, Wax was immediately struck by how *populated* the land was south of Elendel.

It was easy to forget how many people lived in cities other than the capital. The railway rolled along beside a river wide enough to swallow whole towns up in the Roughs. Villages, towns, and even cities sprinkled the route, so common that the train barely went five minutes without passing another one. Between the towns, orchards stretched into the distance. Fields of wheat bowed and danced. Everything was green and vibrant, refreshed on evenings when the mists came out.

Wax turned from the window and dug into the package Ranette had sent him. Inside, in a fitted, plush-lined case, was a large double-barreled shotgun. Beside it, in their own indentations, were three spheres each wrapped with a thin cord.

The spheres and cords he'd expected. The shotgun was a treat.

Experimenting with extra-powerful loads, a note read, *and enormous slugs, for stopping Thugs or full-blooded koloss. Please test. Will require increased weight on your part to fire. Recoil should be exceptional.*

Rust and Ruin, the shells for this thing were almost as wide as a man’s wrist. It was like a cannon. He held one up as the train slowed into a station. It wasn’t quite dark yet, but windows in the town were bright with electricity.

Electric lights. He lowered the shell, studying them. The outer cities had electricity?

Of course they do, idiot, he immediately thought to himself. Why wouldn’t they? He’d fallen into the same trap he’d once mocked others for. He’d started to assume that anything important, trendy, or exciting happened inside Elendel. That sort of attitude had annoyed him when he’d lived in the Roughs.

The train yielded a handful of passengers and picked up fewer, which surprised Wax, considering the crowded platform. Were they waiting for another train? He leaned to the side to get a better look out the window. No … the people were clumped together, listening to one of their number shout something Wax couldn’t hear. As he strained to read a sign one of the people carried, someone threw an egg and it *splatted* right beside his window.

He pulled back. The train started up again, having waited only a fraction of the time it normally did at a stop. As it eased out of the station, more eggs flew toward it. Wax finally got a good look at the sign. END ELENDEL OPPRESSION!

Oppression? He frowned, leaning as the train turned a bend, letting him watch the crowd of people on the platform. A few hopped onto the tracks and shook fists.

“Steris?” he asked, packing away Ranette’s box. “Have you paid attention to the outer cities situation?”

No reply came. He glanced toward his fiancée, who still sat across the compartment from him, huddled in her seat with a blanket around her shoulders. She didn’t appear to have noticed the stop or the eggs; her face was stuck so far into her book that snapping it closed would have caught her nose.

Landre, the lady’s maid, had gone to ready Steris’s bed, and Wayne was doing who knows what. So the two of them were alone in the room.

“Steris?”

No reply. Wax cocked his head, trying to read the spine and make out what had her so fascinated, but she’d wrapped the volume in a cloth cover. He inched to the side, and saw that her eyes were wide as she read. She turned the page quickly.

Wax frowned, rising and leaning across to get a view of one of the pages. Steris saw him, jumped, and snapped the book closed. “Oh!” she said. “Did you say something?”

“What are you reading?”

“History of New Seran,” Steris said, tucking the book under her arm.

“You looked shocked as you read.”

“Well, I don’t know if you realize it, but the name Seran has a very disturbing history. What did you want to ask me?”

Wax settled back. “I saw a crowd on the train platform. They seemed angry about Elendel.”

“Oh, hum, yes. Let’s see. Outer cities … political situation.” She seemed to need a moment to compose herself. What *had* she read in that history that was so disconcerting? “Well, I’m not surprised to hear of it. They aren’t happy, for obvious reasons.”

“You mean the taxation issues? They’re *that* upset?” He looked out the window, but they were too far away now for him to make out the crowd. “We only tax them a little, to maintain infrastructure and government.”

“Well, they would argue that they don’t need our government, as they have their own city administrations. Waxillium, many in the Basin feel that Elendel is trying to act as if our governor were some kind of emperor—something that was supposed to have ended when the Lord Mistborn stepped down after his century of rule.”

“But our taxes don’t pay Governor Aradel,” Wax said. “They pay for things like constables to police the docks and the maintenance of the railway lines.”

“Technically that is correct,” Steris said. “But then all goods are *also* taxed when they enter Elendel using the very railway lines and rivers we maintain. Have you noticed that there are almost no railway lines traveling directly from city to city outside of Elendel? Other than the interchange at Doriel, everyone wishing to go from one outer city to another must go *toward* Elendel. Want to ship something from Elmsdel to Rashekin? Have to pass through Elendel. Want to sell metals in Tathingdwel? Have to pass through Elendel.”

“A hub system makes perfect sense,” Wax said.

“And it also lets us tax practically all goods shipped throughout the entire Basin,” Steris said. “By outer cities arguments, that means we’re taxing them *twice*. First by our levies to maintain the railway lines, then a second time by making them pass everything through us. They’ve lobbied for years to get some direct lines running around the Basin in a loop, and have always been denied.”

“Huh,” Wax said, settling back.

“The rivers are just as bad,” Steris said. “We don’t control where they were placed, of course. But they do all flow toward Elendel, so we control water traffic. There are roadways between towns, but they’re horribly inefficient compared to water or rail travel, so Elendel tariffs basically set prices around the Basin. We can be certain that any goods produced in the city are never undercut, and can provide incentives for things we *don’t* produce to be sold at a discount in the city.”

Wax nodded slowly. He’d had an inkling, and had heard about the outer cities’ complaints. But he’d always read Elendel broadsheets on the matter; to hear it spelled out so directly by Steris made him marvel at his own shortsightedness.

“I should have paid more attention. Perhaps I should talk to Aradel about this.”

“Well, there are reasons Elendel does as it has.” Steris set her book aside and stood to get down a piece of luggage. Wax eyed the book, noting that she’d marked her page. He reached toward it, but a sudden jerk by the train sent Steris sitting back down with a thump, and she set her suitcase on the book. “Lord Waxillium?”

“Sorry. Continue.”

“Well, the governor and Senate are trying to maintain a single unified nation in the Basin, rather than letting it fracture into a bunch of city-states. They’re using the economics to push the outer cities to accept centralized rule in exchange for lowered tariffs. Even Aradel, as a moderate liberal, has accepted that this is good for the Basin as a whole. Of course, the noble houses don’t care so much about unity as reaping the benefits of a stranglehold on trade.”

“And I assume I’ve benefited from these policies?”

“Benefited?” Steris said. “You practically thrive on them, Lord Waxillium. Your textiles and metalworks would be undercut dramatically without these tariffs. You’ve voted for maintaining them twice and for *raising* them once.”

“I … have?”

“Well, I have,” Steris said. “You did tell me to see to your house’s interests in voting at—”

“Yes, I know,” Wax said, sighing.

The train rocked on its tracks, rhythmic thumps sounding from below. Wax turned back to the window, but they weren’t passing a town at the moment, and everything was growing dark. No mist tonight.

“Is something wrong, Lord Waxillium?” Steris asked. “Whenever we speak of politics or house finances, you grow distant.”

“It’s because I’m a child sometimes, Steris,” Wax said. “Please, continue your instruction. These are things I need to learn. Don’t let my foolishness discourage you.”

Steris leaned forward and rested her hand on his arm. “These last six months have been difficult. You can be excused for letting your attention toward politics lapse.”

He continued looking out the window. Following Lessie’s first death, he’d lost himself. He’d determined not to react that way again, and had thrown his attention into working with the constables. Anything to keep him occupied, and to prevent him from lapsing into the same melancholy inactivity that had struck him when he'd first lost her.

"I've still been a fool. And maybe there's more. Steris, I've never had a mind for politics, even when I was trying to do my duty. It might be beyond me."

"In our months together, I've come to see you as a fiercely intelligent person. The puzzles I've seen you solve, the answers I've seen you tease out … Why, they're nothing short of remarkable. You are most certainly capable of caring for your house. Begging your pardon, I'd say it is not your mind, but what you mind, that is the issue."

Wax smiled, looking toward her. "Steris, you're a delight. How could anyone ever think you dull?"

"But I *am* dull."

"Nonsense."

"And when I asked you to help me review my list of preparations for the trip?"

That list had been *twenty-seven* pages long. "I still can't believe you got all those things into our bags."

"All of—" Steris blinked. "Lord Waxillium, I didn't *bring* all of those things."

"But you made a list."

"To think of everything we *might* need. I feel better when something goes wrong if I've contemplated that it might. At least this way, if we run into something we've forgotten, I can feel good knowing I figured we might need it."

"But if you didn't bring all of that stuff, then what is in all those boxes? I saw Herve struggling to lug a few of them up to the train."

"Oh," Steris said, opening the suitcase she'd gotten down. "Why, our house finances, of course."

Indeed, inside was a large stack of ledgers.

“This trip was unplanned,” Steris explained, “and I have to prepare an accountability report for the banks by next month. House Ladrian has recovered for the most part from your uncle’s spending—but we need to maintain strict books in order to convince lenders we’re solvent, so they will be willing to work with us.”

“We have accountants, Steris,” Wax said.

“Yes, this is their work,” she said. “I need to check it over—you can’t simply *turn in* someone else’s work without making certain the work was done properly. Besides, they’re off three clips in this quarter’s financials.”

“Three clips?” Wax said. “Out of how much money?”

“Five million.”

“They’re off three hundredths of a boxing,” Wax said, “out of five *million*. I’d say that’s not bad.”

“Well, it’s within the thresholds the banks demand,” Steris said, “but it’s still sloppy! These financials are how we represent ourselves to the world, Lord Waxillium. If you want to overcome the impression people have of House Ladrian and its indulgences, you must agree that we have a responsibility to present ourselves— You’re doing it again.”

Wax started, sitting up straighter. “Excuse me.”

“Distant look in your eyes,” Steris noted. “Aren’t you the one who is always talking about the responsibility men have to uphold the law?”

“Different thing entirely.”

“But your responsibility to your house—”

“—is why I’m here, Steris,” Wax said. “Why I came back in the first place. I recognize it. I acknowledge it.”

“You just don’t like it.”

“A man doesn’t have to like his duty. He just has to do it.”

She clasped her hands in her lap, studying him. “Here, let me show you something.” She rose, reaching for another suitcase on the rack above her seat.

Wax took her moment of distraction as a chance to slip the book she’d been reading out from its hiding place. He flipped forward to the page she’d marked, curious to discover exactly what about New Seran had captivated her so.

He was completely shocked, then, when the page didn't contain a historical description, but instead *anatomy* sketches. Along with long descriptions explaining … human reproduction?

The room grew very still. Wax glanced up to find Steris staring at him with a look of horror on her face. She went beet red and dropped to her seat, covering her face with her hands and groaning loudly.

"Um…" Wax said. "I guess … hm…"

"I think I'm going to throw up," Steris said.

"I didn't mean to pry, Steris. You were just acting so *odd,* and so fascinated by what was in the book—"

She groaned again.

Wax sat, awkward in the shaking train car, searching for words. "So … you don't have any … experience in these matters, I assume."

"I keep asking for details," Steris said, slumping back into her seat and leaning her head back against the wall, looking up at the ceiling. "But nobody will tell me anything. 'You'll figure it out,' they say with a wink and a grin. 'The body knows what to do.' But what if mine *doesn't*? What if I do it *wrong*?"

"You could have asked me."

"Because *that* wouldn't be embarrassing," Steris said, closing her eyes. "I know the basics; I'm not an idiot. But I *need* to provide an heir. It's vital. How am I supposed to do this properly if I don't have any information? I tried to interview some prostitutes about it—"

"Wait. You did?"

"Yes. A trio of very nice young ladies; met them for tea, but they clammed up the moment they discovered who I was—they even got strangely protective, and wouldn't give me any details *either*. I get the impression they thought I was cute. What about being a spinster could possibly be cute? Do you realize I'm almost *thirty*?"

"One foot in the grave, obviously," Wax said.

“It’s easy to joke when you’re a man,” she snapped. “You’re not on a deadline to provide something useful to this arrangement.”

“You’re worth more than your ability to bear children, Steris.”

“That’s right. There’s my money too.”

“And all *I* am to this arrangement is a title,” Wax said. “It goes both ways.”

Steris settled back, breathing in and out through her teeth for a few moments. Finally she cracked one eye. “You can shoot things too.”

“What every proper lady needs in a man.”

“Murdering is very traditional. Goes all the way back.”

Wax smiled. “Actually, if you want to be *strictly* traditional—going back to the Imperial Pair—it was the lady in the relationship who did the murdering.”

“Either way, I apologize for my tirade. It was completely uncalled for. I shall endeavor to be firmer with myself following our union.”

“Don’t be silly,” Wax said. “I like seeing moments like this from you.”

“You like it when ladies are in distress?”

“I like it when you show me something new. It’s good to remember that people have different sides.”

“Well,” she said, taking the book, “I can continue my research at another point. Our wedding has been delayed, after all.”

This was to be the night, he realized. *Our first night of marriage.* He’d known, of course, but thinking about it made him feel … what? Relieved? Sad? Both?

“If it eases your mind,” Wax said as she tucked the book into her suitcase, “we won’t need to be … involved with any real frequency, particularly once a child is provided. I don’t imagine your research will be necessary for more than a dozen or so occasions.”

As he said it she wilted, shoulders slumping, head bowing. She was still facing away from him, digging in her suitcase, but he spotted it immediately.

Damn. That had been a stupid thing to say, hadn’t it? If Lessie had been here, she’d have stomped on his toe for that one. He felt sick, then cleared his throat. “That was injudicious of me, Steris. I’m sorry.”

“The truth should never be the wrong thing to say, Lord Waxillium,” she said, straightening and looking toward him, composed once again. “This is exactly as our arrangement was to be, as I know full well. I *did* write the contract.”

Wax crossed the train car, then sat next to her, resting his hand on hers. “I don’t like this talk from you. Or from me. It’s become a habit for us to pretend this relationship is nothing more than titles and money. But Steris, when Lessie died…” He choked off, then took a deep breath before continuing. “Everyone wanted to talk to me. Speak at me. *Blather* about how they knew what I was feeling. But you just let me weep. Which was what I needed more than anything. Thank you.”

She met his eyes, then squeezed his hand.

“What we are together,” Wax said to her, “and what we make of our future need not be spelled out by a piece of paper.” Or, well, a large stack of them. “The contract need not set our bounds.”

“Pardon. But I thought that was exactly the purpose of a contract. To define and set bounds.”

“And the purpose of life is to push our bounds,” Wax said, “to shatter them, escape them.”

“An odd position,” Steris said, cocking her head, “for a lawman.”

“Not at all,” Wax said. He thought for a moment, then crossed to his side of the chamber again and dug into Ranette’s box, getting out one of the metal spheres wound with a long cord. “Do you recognize this?”

“I noticed you looking at it earlier.”

Wax nodded. “Third version of her hook device, like the one we used to climb ZoBell Tower. Watch.”

He burned steel and Pushed on the sphere. It leaped from his fingers, streaking toward the bar on the luggage rack, trailing the cord behind—which he held in his hand. As the sphere reached the rack, Wax Pushed on a specific thin blue line revealed by his Allomantic senses. It pointed to a latch hidden inside the sphere, like the one inside Vindication that turned off the safety.

A hidden set of hooks deployed from the sphere. He tugged the cord, and was pleased to find that it locked into place, catching on the luggage rack.

Way more handy than the other designs, Wax thought, impressed. He Pushed on the switch a second time, and the mechanism disengaged, retracting the hooks with a snap. The ball fell to the couch beside Steris, and Wax pulled it into his hand by the cord.

“Clever,” Steris said. “And this relates to the conversation how?”

Wax Pushed on the sphere again, but this time didn’t engage the mechanism. Instead he held the cord tight, giving the sphere about three feet of line. It jerked to a stop in midair, hovering. He kept Pushing, upward and away from him at an angle—but also held the cord, and that kept the sphere from falling.

“People,” Wax said, “are like cords, Steris. We snake out, striking this way and that, always looking for something new. That’s human nature, to discover what is hidden. There’s so much we can do, so many places we can go.” He shifted in his seat, changing his center of gravity, which caused the sphere to rotate upward on its tether.

“But if there aren’t any boundaries,” he said, “we’d get tangled up. Imagine a thousand of these cords, zipping through the room. The law is there to keep us from ruining everyone else’s ability to explore. Without law, there’s no freedom. That’s why I am what I am.”

“And the hunt?” Steris asked, genuinely curious. “That doesn’t interest you?”

“Sure it does,” Wax said, smiling. “That’s part of the discovery, part of the *search*. Find who did it. Find the secrets, the answers.”

There was, of course, another part—the part Miles had forced Wax to admit. There was a certain perverse anger that lawmen directed at those who broke the law, almost a *jealousy*. How dare these people escape? How dare they go the places nobody else was allowed to?

He let the sphere drop, and Steris picked it up, looking it over with a meticulous eye. “You talk about answers, secrets, and the search. Why is it you hate politics so much?”

“Well, it might be because sitting in a stuffy room and listening to people complain is the *opposite* of discovery.”

“No!” Steris said. “Every meeting is a mystery, Lord Waxillium. What are their motives? What quiet lies are they telling, and what truths can you discover?” She tossed his sphere back to him, then took her suitcase and set it on the small cocktail table in the center of the cabin. “House finances are the same.”

“House finances,” he said, flatly.

“Yes!” Steris said. She fished in the suitcase, getting out a ledger. “See, look.” She flipped it open and pointed at an account.

He looked at the page, then up at her. *Such excitement,* he thought. But … ledgers?

“Three clips,” he said. “The tables are different by three clips. I’m sorry, Steris, it’s a meaningless amount. I don’t see—”

“It’s *not* meaningless,” she said, scooting over to sit beside him. “Don’t you see? The answer is *here* somewhere, in this book. Aren’t you even curious? The mystery of where they went?” She nodded to him, excited.

“Well, I suppose you could show me how to look,” he said. He dreaded the idea, but then, she looked so happy.

“Here,” she said, handing him a ledger, then fishing out another. “Look at goods received. Compare the dates and the payouts to the ledger! I’m going to study maintenance.”

He glanced toward the window in their door, half expecting Wayne to be out there in the hallway, snickering himself senseless at the prank. But Wayne was not there. This was no prank. Steris grabbed her own ledgers and attacked them with as much ferocity as a hungry man might a good steak.

Wax sighed, sat back, and started looking through the numbers.

THE
NEW ASCE

Vol. 6, No.220

NEW SERAN, 8th of CL

ALLOMANCER JAK
presents

Nicki Savage, Paranatural Detective
in...

The Constructs of Antiquity

When a thief steals a large map of New Seran, Ms. Savage is on the case. The map's secret pocket contains her father's parting gift to her, the location of a tribe of metal beings—the kalkis—lost creations of the Lord Ruler. Currently the only one keeping our daring debutante from the secrets of the Unknown Constructs of Antiquity is the magical burglar she calls the Haunted Man!

Part Two

"The Ghastly Gondola!"

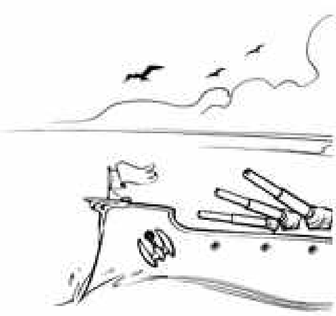
I arrived just as the gondola doors slammed shut and the whole conveyance lurched away. Behind the glass doors, the haunted man smiled, the green glow of his devices lighting him from below.

I ran alongside the car, matching pace with it while at the same time digging out my trusty little bottle of chromium for a quick swig. Warmth rose from my stomach to my throat, and so did my confidence.

As the car slid away from the dock, I leapt into the air.

(Continued below the fold!)

BILMING'S NEV 'AMUSE' ELENDE



A week ago, Bilming's Lord Mayor Bastien Severington stood at the city's impressive harbor and greeted high-ranking officials and noblepersons of the Elendel Senate. Like the peaceable tortoise—symbol of Bilming's great city—Governor Severington's gracious invitation to Elendel's elite has been seen as a gesture of friendship and unity.

More impressive than the harbor are the rows of ships docked there. Most are the usual familiar clippers and cargo ships, but among them float metal beasts like sharks among turtles. These are the warships developed by Lord Mayor Severington and the late Dr. Florin Malin, predecessor to the Basin's current Minister of Science and Technology.

"Each ship carries eight 12-inch twin guns with each turret having a range of sixteen miles," said Severington. "Other improvements include reinfoced armor hulls, electrical rangefinders, and a top speed of 24 miles an hour. We call them Pewternauts."

But some members of Elendel's delegation were not impressed.

"What an amusing display of toys," said Senator Inis Julien. "Why do we need warships? The Basin is alone on land and on the seas. From whom do we need protection?"

(Continued on back.)

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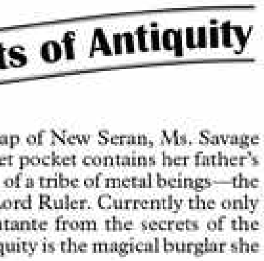
Broken Gondola Strands Passengers

An unidentified disturbance halted the Zinc Line yesterday evening about sunset, according to the New Seran Transportation Authority. The NSTA carried passengers home the old-fashioned way, on donkeys and rickshaws down the switchbacks. We see this as proof for the need of a back-up emergency transport system.



(Continued on back.)

Drink to the Health of Elendel!

NOW PLAYING!
at the Uptown Trio Theater
THE
DEN OF THE
SURVIVOR!
A crew of freedom fighters
RISE UP AGAINST OPRESSION
and
OVERTHROW A CORRUPT GOV'T

The Ghastly Gondola!

The monks of Baz-Kor had trained me well, their practiced moves designed to get a leecher close enough to touch another Allomancer and drain them of their reserves. But it was the ballet lessons that enabled my jump from the platform onto the

6

Marasi stopped on the image of the monster.

It was evening; people chatted softly around her in the dining car, and the train rolled around a picturesque bend, but for a moment she was transfixed by that image. A sketch of violent, rough lines that somehow conveyed a terrible dread. Most of the pages in the stack VenDell had delivered contained transcripts of questions answered—or, more often, not answered—by the wounded kandra.

This was different. A wild sketch using two colors of pencil to depict a terrible visage. A burning red face, a distorted mouth, horns and spikes streaking out along the rim. But black eyes, drawn like voids on the red skin. It looked like a childhood terror ripped right out of a nightmare.

The bottom of the page had a caption. *ReLuur's sketch of the creature described on 8/7/342.* Yesterday.

The next page was an interview.

VenDell: Describe to us again the thing you saw.

ReLuur: The beast.

VenDell: Yes, the beast. It guarded the bracers?

ReLuur: No. No! It was before. Fallen from the sky.

VenDell: The sky?

ReLuur: The darkness above. It is of the void. It has no eyes. It looks at me! It's looking at me now!

Further questioning was delayed for an hour as ReLuur whimpered in the corner, inconsolable. When he became responsive again, he drew this sketch without prompting, muttering about the thing *he had seen. Something is wrong with the eyes of the creature. Perhaps spikes?*

Spikes. Marasi pulled her purse from under the table, digging into it as the couple at the table behind her laughed loudly, calling for more wine. Marasi pushed aside the two-shot pistol she had tucked inside and took out a thin book, a copy of the one that Ironeyes had given to Waxillium.

Inside it she found the description she wanted, words written by the Lord Mistborn, Lestibournes. *So far as I've been able to figure out, Hemalurgy can create practically anything by rewriting its Spiritual aspect. But hell, even the Lord Ruler had trouble getting it right. His koloss were great soldiers—I mean, they could eat* dirt *and stuff to stay alive—but they basically spent all day killing each other on a whim, and resented no longer being human. The kandra are better, but they turn to piles of goop if they don't have spikes—and they can't reproduce on their own.*

I guess what I'm saying is that you shouldn't experiment too much with this aspect of Hemalurgy. It's basically useless; there are a million ways to mess up for every one way there is to get a good result. Stick to transferring powers and you'll be better off. Trust me.

It was so *odd* to read the Lord Mistborn's words and have them sound so casual. This was the Survivor of the Flames, the governor who had ruled mankind in benevolence for a century, guiding them on the difficult path to rebuild civilization. He sounded so *normal*. He even admitted in one section to having Breeze, Counselor of Gods, write most of his speeches for him. So all of the famous words, quotes, and inscriptions attributed to the Lord Mistborn were fabrications.

Not that he was a fool. No, the book was full of insight. Disturbing insight. The Lord Mistborn advocated gathering the Metalborn who were elderly or terminally ill, then asking them to sacrifice themselves to make these … spikes, which could in turn be used to create individuals of great power.

He made a good argument in the book. It wouldn’t have been so disturbing if it had been easy to dismiss.

She studied the descriptions of Hemalurgic experiments in the book, trying to ignore the loud couple behind her. Could this drawing be of a new kind of Hemalurgic monster, like those Wax had encountered under Elendel? Designed by the Set, or perhaps the result of a failed experiment? Or was this instead related to the continually ephemeral Trell, the god with an unknown metal?

She eventually put them aside and focused on her primary task. How to find ReLuur’s spike? He’d been wounded in some kind of explosion that had ripped off part of his body, and he’d been forced to flee, leaving the flesh—and the spike—behind.

Kandra flesh remained in its humanlike state once cut free of the body, so those cleaning up after the explosion would have simply disposed of it, right? She needed to see if they’d created some kind of mass grave for people killed in that explosion. Of course, if the Set knew what to look for in a kandra’s corpse, they might have recovered the spike. The pictures—and the possibility they were experimenting with Hemalurgy—made that more plausible. So that was another potential lead. And …

And was that Wayne’s voice? Marasi turned to look at the laughing couple behind her. Sure enough, Wayne had joined them, and was chatting amicably with the drunk pair, who wore fine evening attire. Wayne, as usual, was in Roughs trousers and suspenders, duster hung on the peg beside the table.

He saw Marasi and grinned, drinking a cup of the couple’s wine before bidding them farewell. The train hit a sharp bump, causing plates to rattle on tables as Wayne slid into the seat across from Marasi, his face full of grin.

“Mooching wine?” Marasi asked.

“Nah,” he said. “They’re drinking bubbly. Can barely stand the stuff. *I’m* mooching accents. Those folks, they’re from New Seran. Gotta get a feel for how people talk there.”

“Ah. You do realize it’s proper to remove your hat indoors, correct?”

“Sure do.” He tipped his hat at her, then leaned back in his chair and somehow got his booted feet up on the small table. “What’re *you* doin’ in here?” he asked.

“The dining car?” Marasi asked. “I just wanted a place to spread out.”

“Wax rented us out an entire *train car*, woman,” Wayne said, pointing at a passing waiter, then pointing at his mouth and making a tipping motion. “We’ve got like six rooms or somethin’ all to ourselves.”

“Maybe I simply wanted to be around people.”

“And we ain’t people?”

“That is subject to some dispute in your case.”

He grinned, then winked at her as the waiter finally stepped over.

“You wanted—” the waiter began.

“Liquor,” Wayne said.

“Would you care to be a little more specific, sir?”

“*Lots* of liquor.”

The waiter sighed, then glanced at Marasi, and she shook her head. “Nothing for me.”

He moved off to obey. “No bubbly!” Wayne shouted after him, earning him more than one glare from the car’s other occupants. He then turned to eye Marasi. “So? Gonna answer my question? What’re you hidin’ from, Marasi?”

She sat for a moment, feeling the rhythmic rattle of the train’s motion. “Does it ever bother you to be in his shadow, Wayne?”

“Who? Wax? I mean, he’s been putting on weight, but he’s not *that* fat yet, is he?” He grinned, though that faded when she didn’t smile back. And, in an uncharacteristic moment of solemnity, he slid his boots off the table and rested one elbow on it instead, leaning toward her.

“Nah,” he said after some thought. “Nah, it doesn’t. But I don’t care much if people look at me or not. Sometimes my life is easier if they *ain’t* looking at me, ya know? I like listening.” He eyed her. “You’re sore that he thought you couldn’t do this on your own?”

“No,” she said. “But … I don’t know, Wayne. I studied law in the first place—studied famous lawkeepers—because I wanted to become something others thought I couldn’t. I got the job at the precinct, and thought I’d accomplished something, but Aradel later admitted he was first interested in hiring me because he wanted someone who could get close to, and keep an eye on, Waxillium.

“We both know the kandra wanted him on this mission, and they arranged the meeting with me to try to hook him. At the precinct, when I accomplish something, everyone assumes I had Waxillium’s help. Sometimes it’s like I’m no more than an *appendage*.”

“You’re not that at all, Marasi,” Wayne said. “You’re important. You help out a lot. Plus you smell nice, and not all bloody and stuff.”

“Great. I have no idea what you just said.”

“Appendages don’t smell nice,” Wayne said. “And they’re kinda gross. I cut one outta a fellow once.”

“You mean an appendix?”

“Sure.” He hesitated. “So…”

“Not the same thing.”

“Right. Thought you was makin’ a metaphor, since people don’t need one of those and all.”

Marasi sighed, leaning back and rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hands. Why was she discussing this with *Wayne* again?

“I understand,” he said. “I know what you’re feeling, Mara. Wax … he’s kind of overwhelming, eh?”

“It’s hard to fault him,” Marasi said. “He’s effective, and I don’t think he even knows that he’s being overbearing. He fixes things—why should I be upset about that? Rusts, Wayne, I *studied* his life, admiring what he did. I should feel lucky to be part of it. And I do, mostly.”

Wayne nodded. “But you want to be your own person.”

“Exactly!”

“Nobody’s forcing you to stay with us,” Wayne noted. “As I recall, Wax spent a lot of effort at first trying to keep you from always gettin’ involved.”

“I know, I know. I just … Well, this once I was thinking for a time that I might be able to do something important on my own.” She took a deep breath, then let it out. “It’s stupid, I know, but it still feels frustrating. We’ll do all this work, find that spike, and get back to the kandra—then they’ll thank Waxillium.”

Wayne nodded thoughtfully. “I knew this fellow once,” he said, leaning back again, feet on the table, “who thought it would be a good idea to take people huntin’. City folk, you know? Who ain’t never seen an animal larger than a rat what ate too much? Out in the Roughs, we got lions. Fierce things, with lotsa teeth an—”

“I know what a lion is, Wayne.”

“Right. Well, Chip—that’s his name—he got some broadsheets printed up, but borrowed some notes from his girl in order to do it. And so she thought she should get a piece of the money once he got people to pay for this trip. Well, the first money came in, and they got in a fight and she ended up stabbing him right in his holster, if you know what I mean. So he stumbles out into the street all bleedin’, and that’s where the constables found him and told him you can’t be killin’ no lions. There’s a law about it, see, as they’re some kind of noble natural treasure, or some such.

“Anyway, they took Chip and stuffed him in jail, where they slammed the bars—by accident—on his rusting fingers. Broke his hand up right good, and he can’t bend the tips of his fingers no more.”

His drink arrived—a bottle of whiskey and a small cup. He took it, telling the waiter to charge Waxillium, then poured some and settled back.

“Is that the end?” Marasi asked.

“What?” Wayne said. “You want *more* to happen to the poor fellow? Right sadistic of you, Marasi. Right sadistic.”

“I didn’t mean…” She took a deep breath. “Did that have any relevance to the situation I’m in?”

“Not really,” Wayne said, taking a drink, then removing a little wooden box from his pocket and getting out a ball of gum. “But I tell ya, Chip, he has it *really* bad. Whenever I’m thinkin’ my life is miserable, I remember him, and tell myself, ‘Well, Wayne. At least you ain’t a broke, dickless feller what can’t even pick his own nose properly.’ And I feels better.”

He winked at her, popped the gum in his mouth, then slipped away from the table. He waved to MeLaan, who was wearing a fine lace gown and oversized hat. A normal woman would have needed *quite* the corset to pull off the outfit, but the kandra had probably just sculpted her body to fit. Which was horribly unfair.

Marasi stared at the notes. Wayne had left her feeling confused, which was not unusual, but perhaps there was wisdom in what he said. She dug back into the research, but it wasn’t too long before she started to droop. It was getting late, the sun having fully set outside, and they wouldn’t arrive for another few hours. So she packed up the stack of pages inside their large folder.

As she did, something slipped out of the folder. Marasi frowned, holding it up. A small cloth pouch. Opening it revealed a small Pathian earring and a note.

Just in case, Waxillium.

She yawned, tucking it away, and pushed out of the dining car. The private car Waxillium had hired for them was two cars back, at the tail end of the train. She held tight to the sheets as she stepped onto the open-air platform between cars, wind whipping at her. A short railman stood here, and eyed her as she crossed to the next car. He didn’t say anything this time, though last time he’d tried to encourage her not to move between cars, insisting that he’d bring her food if she wished.

The next car over was first-class, with a row of private rooms on one side. Marasi passed electric lights glowing on the walls as she crossed the car. Last time she’d been on a train, those had been gas, with bright, steady mantles. She liked progress, but these seemed much less reliable—they'd waver when the train slowed, for example.

She crossed to the final car, then passed her own room and walked toward the room where Waxillium and Steris had taken dinner, to check on them. Both were still there, surprisingly. Waxillium she had expected, but late nights were not Steris's thing.

Marasi slid open the door, peeking in. "Waxillium?"

The man knelt on the floor, his seat covered in ledgers and sheets of paper. Eyes intent on one of them, he held up his hand toward her in a quieting gesture as she started to ask what he was doing.

Marasi frowned. Why—

"Aha!" Waxillium proclaimed, standing up. "I found it!"

"What?" Steris said. "Where?"

"Tips."

"I looked in tips."

"One of the dockworkers turned the request in late," Waxillium said, grabbing a sheet and spinning it toward Steris. "He tipped a dock boy four clips to run a message for him, and asked for reimbursement. Dockmaster gave it to him, and filed a note, but he wrote the four like a three and the accountants recorded it that way."

Steris looked it over with wide eyes. "You bastard," she said, causing Marasi to blink. She'd *never* heard language like that from Steris. "How did you figure this out?"

Waxillium grinned, folding his arms. "Wayne would say it's because I'm brilliant."

"Wayne has the mental capacity of a fruit fly," Steris said. "In comparison to him, anyone is brilliant. I…" She trailed off, noticing Marasi for the first time. She blinked, and her expression became more reserved. "Marasi. Welcome. Would you like to sit?"

"On what?" Marasi asked. Every surface was covered in ledgers and pages. "The luggage rack? Are those house *finances*?"

“I found a lost clip,” Waxillium said. “The last one, I should add, which gives me two for the evening, while Steris found one.”

Marasi stared at Steris, who started clearing a place for her to sit. She looked to Waxillium, who stood beaming with the sheet in his hand, looking it over again as if it were some lost metal he’d rescued from a labyrinth.

“A lost clip,” Marasi said. “Great. Maybe you can find something in these.” She held up the pages VenDell had given her. “I’m heading to bed for a few hours.”

“Hmm?” Waxillium said. “Oh, sure. Thanks.” He set down the page with some reluctance, taking the folder.

“Be sure to look at the drawings of monsters,” Marasi said, yawning. “Oh, and this was in there.” She tossed him the pouch with the earring and walked back into the hallway.

She walked toward her room, feeling the train slow once more. Another town? Or were there sheep crossing the tracks again? They were supposed to be getting into the part of the route that was the prettiest. Too bad it would be so dark out.

She walked back to her door, first of those in their car, and glanced out the front window toward the rest of the train, which she was surprised to see moving off into the distance. She gaped for a moment, and then the door at the other end of the car burst open.

The man standing on the platform beyond leveled a gun down the corridor and fired.

7

“Well, I think you showed a real talent for this, Lord Waxillium, as I believe *I* suggested—”

Wax stopped listening to Steris.

Train slowing.

Chugging sounds retreating.

Door opening.

Wax burned steel.

Steris continued talking, and he nodded absently, part of him going through the motions as the rest of him came alert. He heard a click and Pushed to his left and held it, Pushing to the right against the frame of the train car to keep himself from moving.

As the bullet passed in the hallway outside, his Push—already in place—slammed it sideways into the wall.

Go. His Push had shoved open the door. He dropped the earring—damn that VenDell—and Pushed to the right, on the train car’s metal window frame. This launched him out to the left, streaking into the hallway. He rammed into the wall where he'd Pushed the bullet, Vindication in hand, and drilled the surprised man at the end of the hallway in the forehead.

Marasi clipped off a scream. Steris stuck her head out into the hallway, wide-eyed. Not the smartest move, but she'd rarely been in gunfights.

"Thanks," Marasi said.

He nodded curtly. "Get your sister behind some cover." He slipped past her and stepped out onto the small platform between train cars—only, their car had been unhooked and left to drift. A group of three shocked-looking men on horses rode alongside the slowing car.

Horses? Wax thought. *Really?*

By the starlight—which was bright tonight, with no clouds and the Red Rip low on the horizon—he could see they wore vests over their shirts and sturdy trousers. A larger crowd of them galloped alongside the train ahead. This wasn't a specific attack on just his car, but a full-blown armed robbery.

That meant he had to be quick.

He shoved on the platform beneath him and decreased his weight. The three robbers nearby started firing, but Wax's Push flung him into the air above their shots and his decreased weight meant that the wind resistance pushed him backward, onto the train car. He landed, increased his weight, and picked one man off his horse.

The remaining bandits took off forward, kicking their horses and chasing after the others, yelling, "Allomancer! Allomancer!"

Blast, Wax thought, dropping one of the men as the other dodged his horse into a stand of trees. He was out of pistol range in a moment, and would soon catch his fellows.

Wax dropped onto the platform and rushed down the hallway. The room he'd shared with Steris was empty, but he spotted quivering blue lines in the one next door. Marasi had wisely piled everyone into the servants' compartment.

"Robbery," Wax said as he threw open the door, startling the servants, Marasi, and Steris. Most of them sat on the floor, though Marasi was by the window, peeking out. And Steris was on the built-in seat, remarkably composed.

“Robbers?” Steris asked. “Really, Lord Waxillium, *must* you bring your hobbies with you everywhere we go?”

“They’re going after the rest of the train,” Wax said, pointing. “The first thieves must have recognized this car as a private one, probably lush with riches to plunder, and so they uncoupled it. But something is wrong.”

“Other than people trying to kill us?” Marasi asked.

“No,” Steris said, “in my experience, that’s quite normal.”

“What’s *wrong,*” Wax said, “is that they’re riding horses.”

The others stared at him.

“Horseback train robberies,” Wax said, “are something out of the story magazines. Nobody *actually* does that. What good does it do to board a moving train, risking your life, when you can just stop the vehicle like the Vanishers did?”

“So our bad guys…” Marasi said.

“New to this,” Wax said. “Or they’ve been reading too much cheap fiction. Either way, they’re still going to be dangerous. I can’t risk leaving you here, in case they come back for you. So keep your heads down and *hang on*.”

“Hang on?” Herve said. “Why—”

Wax ducked back out into the hallway and ran to the back end of the car. After checking out the doorway, he jumped onto the tracks behind the private car, which was finally rolling to a stop. Then he tapped his metalminds and increased his weight.

A lot.

The gravel sank under his feet as his body became increasingly heavy. He gritted his teeth, flared his metal, and *Pushed*.

The car lurched in place as if another train had crashed into it. His Push sent it rattling along the tracks, and Wax let out his breath. His muscles didn’t hurt, but he felt as if he’d slammed into a wall.

He released his metalmind, returning his weight to normal, and Pushed on the rails to pull himself out of the gravel. He almost lost a boot in the process.

He Pushed against the tracks once more, sending himself chasing after the moving car. *Not nearly fast enough,* he thought as he dropped to the ground and increased his weight again. The car rocked as he shoved it, then he hopped and followed, repeating the process three more times to get it up to speed. Then finally he Pushed himself all the way up to it, jamming his shoulder against the back wall and using Allomancy on the tracks behind to sustain and increase the momentum.

Ground passed behind in a blur, rows and rows of wooden ties, the steel rails with a continuous stream of metal lines that pointed toward Wax's chest. He groaned, and moved so his back was toward the wall. Still, the Pushing threatened to crush him, as he couldn't increase his weight here much or risk ripping up the tracks.

They shot past a group of horses with a few youths guarding them—the bandits' extra mounts. Wax raised Vindication and fired a few shots into the air, but the horses were too well trained to spook at the sound.

He redoubled his Push as he thought he heard gunfire ahead of him. A moment later, his car slammed into the train proper. Wax let go, dropping to the platform, his back aching. The couplers had engaged, however, and the car remained attached to the rest of the train.

He peeked into the car, then ducked in, passing the room where the others were hiding. In his own compartment, he dropped Vindication into her holster, then yanked his gun case off the top rack.

"Waxillium?" Marasi said, slipping into the room.

"You seen Wayne?" Wax asked.

"He was in the dining car a little bit ago."

"He'll be fighting already. If you see him, let him know I'm going to hit the front of the train, then sweep backward." Wax snapped one Sterrion closed, now loaded, then reached for the second.

"Got it," Marasi said. She hesitated. "You're worried."

“No masks.”

“No…”

“Robbers wear masks,” Wax said. He clicked the second Sterrion closed, then buckled on his gunbelt. Vindication, after a reload, went back into his shoulder holster.

“And men who don’t wear masks?”

“They don’t care if they’re seen.” He looked over and met her eyes. “They’re already outlaws, and don’t have anything to lose. Men like that kill easily. What’s more, it’s obvious to me that they’ve never tried a train robbery before. Either they are very, very desperate—or someone put them up to this.”

She paled. “You don’t think the attack is a coincidence.”

“If it is, I’ll eat Wayne’s hat.” He eyed the shotgun Ranette had given him, then tied on his thigh holster and slipped it in. Then he hung two of her cord-and-sphere contraptions from his gunbelt. Finally, he reached up and took a rifle bag off the top shelf and tossed it to Marasi.

“Watch Steris,” he said. “See if you can find Wayne; check on the next car or two, but don’t worry about advancing farther if you meet resistance. Just hold your ground and protect these people.”

“Right.”

He moved toward the hallway, but as soon as he stepped out a hail of gunfire drove him back again. He cursed. All it would take was one aluminum bullet—which he couldn’t Push on—and he’d be dead.

He took a deep breath, then glanced out quickly while Pushing, and counted four bandits on the rear platform of the next car forward.

They fired again. He ducked back and watched the blue lines of bullets as they flew, taking chunks of wood paneling off the wall and splintering his doorframe. It didn’t appear that any of the bullets were aluminum.

“Distraction?” Marasi asked.

“Yes, please,” Wax said, increasing his weight and Pushing on the window frame, launching it out of the side of the car and against a passing tree. “Fire a few times as I leave, then give me a count of twenty, followed by a distraction.”

“Will do.”

Wax threw himself out the window. Immediately he fired Vindication downward, burying a bullet in the ground and giving him something to Push on to launch himself upward. Marasi fired a few quick shots inside, and hopefully the robbers would assume his shot had been inside as well.

Soaring high, wind whipping at his hair and suit coat, he shot a second bullet into the ground, but farther out, and used it to nudge himself to the right—placing him above the train.

He didn’t let himself touch down, instead using a Push on the nails in the train roof to keep flying forward. He soared over his own car and the one the robbers were in, finally landing on the dining car, which was third from the back.

As he turned to face the rear, his mental count hit twenty. A second later, he heard a spray of gunfire coming from Marasi. That was his mark; Wax dropped between the dining car and the robbers’ car.

He fell practically on top of one of the robbers, who was backing out of the second car from the end—which he hadn’t expected. Wax leveled his gun, but the surprised man punched him in the gut.

Wax grunted, increasing his weight. The platform beneath him strained, but when he shoved the robber with his shoulder, it sent the man tumbling toward the tracks. The robber had kindly left the door open for him, and he had a clean shot at the backs of his fellows at the far end, who were focused on Marasi in the last train car beyond.

Wax didn’t shoot; he just Pushed on the metal they were carrying. The men flipped off the rear platform, dropping into the space between cars. One caught the railing. Wax shot him in the arm, then turned, leveling his gun toward the dining car.

People cringed inside, hiding under tables, whimpering. Rusts … Without bandanas or identifying marks to watch for, he’d have trouble spotting the bandits. He set up his steel bubble, a faint Push away from himself in all directions that excluded his own weapons. It was far from perfect—he’d been shot several times while using it—but it did help.

He turned and strode into the second car from the back, the one the robbers had been using, checking for hostiles at each door, his steel bubble rattling doorknobs. First-class passengers were hiding here, and none appeared hurt.

In Wax’s car, Marasi ducked out of the room, carrying one of Wax’s favorite hats. She shrugged apologetically at its numerous holes.

“If I find Wayne, I’ll send him to you,” he told her, reaching to his gunbelt for a metal vial. He came up with wet fingers, and his belt clinked with broken glass.

Damn. The robber who’d slugged him had broken his vials. He hurriedly hopped over the space between cars, entering their private car again. “I need metal,” he explained at Marasi’s inquisitive look.

He stepped up to his room, then hesitated as a hand stuck out of the next room down, holding a small vial.

“Steris?” he said, walking to her. She was still sitting on the plush train bench—though her face was paler than before. “Steel flakes in suspension,” she said, wiggling the vial.

“Since when have you carried one of these?” Wax asked, taking it from her.

“Since about six months ago. I put one into my purse in case you might need it.” She raised her other hand, displaying two more. “I carry the other two because I’m neurotic.”

He grinned, taking all three. He downed the first one, then nearly choked. “What the hell is in this?”

“Other than steel?” Steris asked. “Cod-liver oil.”

He looked at her, gaping.

“Whiskey is bad for you, Lord Waxillium. A wife *must* look out for her husband’s health.”

He sighed and drank one more, then tucked the last into his gunbelt. “Stay safe. I’m going to scout the train.” He left and threw himself out the end door, Pushing on the tracks and launching himself in a high arc upward.

The land spread before him, bathed in starlight. The southern end of the Basin, approaching the Seran mountain range, was far more varied in geography than the northern portion. Here, hills rolled across the land, which slowly increased in elevation.

The Seran River cut a strikingly straight path through the hills, often having carved out gorges and canyons. The train line stayed up higher, hugging the tops of hillsides, though its path required it to cut two or three times across the river on large latticework bridges.

The train consisted of eight passenger cars, several cargo cars, and a dining car. He let himself drop, focusing on a specific car near the front where gunshots sounded. As he landed just behind that car, someone stumbled out onto the platform, holding his face.

Armed bank guard, he thought, noting the man's uniform. The train was bringing a payroll shipment inside a courier car disguised as if carrying a more mundane cargo. What was that scent in the air? Formaldehyde? The guard was gasping, and soon another stumbled out after him.

Both fell a moment later to gunfire from inside the courier car. Wax dropped down onto the platform beside the fallen men, checking on them. One was still moving; Wax knelt and moved the man's hand to cover the hole in his shoulder. "Press hard," he said over the sounds of the thumping track. "I'll be back for you."

The man nodded weakly. Wax took a deep breath and stepped into the courier car, where his eyes immediately started burning. Men moved inside, wearing strange masks and working at a large safe in the center. Half a dozen dead guards lay strewn across the floor of the car.

Wax started shooting, flooring several of the robbers, then Pushed himself out again, then upward as the others took cover and started firing back. He landed on the car behind the courier car, holstered Vindication—who was out of bullets—and brought out a Sterrion.

He prepared to drop down to try picking off more robbers, but an explosion inside the courier car interrupted him. It was a small blast, as explosions went, but it still left Wax's ears ringing. He winced and dropped to the platform, noticing figures moving in the smoke, stooping beside the safe, removing its contents. Others started firing at him.

He ducked to the side, then Pushed the door to the courier car closed, blocking the gunfire with the reinforced metal door. He grabbed the wounded guard under the arms and pulled him backward over the small gap between platforms and into the passenger car behind. This was another car with private compartments, though second-class, where those rooms had been filled with larger groups.

It was currently empty; the passengers, hearing the gunfire in the next car, had fled down the train. He checked each room anyway. Afterward, he propped the wounded man against the wall inside one of the rooms and tied a handkerchief around the wound, pulling it tight.

"The money…" the guard said.

"They've got the money," Wax replied. "Stopping them isn't worth risking any more lives."

"But…"

"I got a good look at several of them," Wax said, "and hopefully so did you. We'll give descriptions, chase them down, set a trap on *our* terms. Besides, if they leave now, there might be time to help a few of your friends in there."

The guard nodded weakly. "Couldn't stop them. They threw bottles through the windows.… And then the doors ripped off. Steel doors, Pushed into the room, twisted off their hinges like they were paper…"

Wax felt a chill. So the bandits had Metalborn too. Wax peeked around the wall back toward the courier car, and found the door he'd closed open again. A thin man stood on the platform, wearing a long coat and supporting himself on a cane. He gestured, speaking urgently and motioning for another bandit to lumber toward Wax's car—a hulking brute who had to be almost seven feet tall.

Wonderful. "Get in here," Wax said to the guard, pulling open the luggage compartment in the room's floor. "Keep your head down."

The guard crawled into the compartment, which was cramped and shallow, but large enough for a person, even with a few pieces of luggage in it. Wax pulled out both Sterrions, crouching in the doorway of the private room. The train continued to rock, going around a bend. The thing hadn't stopped. Did the engineer not know about the attack, or was he hoping to get to the next town?

Rusts, the courier car changed all of Wax's assessments. Maybe this *wasn't* about him. But why not simply stop the train and raid it in the wilderness? Too many questions, and no time to answer them. He had a bandit to kill. He'd have to jump out and surprise the brute, bring him down quick. If he was the Metalborn, surprise would be—

Something bounced down the hallway and came to a rest on the floor beside Wax, just outside the doorway in which he crouched. A small metal cube. He jumped back, fearing an explosive, but nothing happened. What had that been?

And then he realized with a deep, bone-chilling horror that he was no longer burning metal. There was nothing inside of him *to* burn.

His steel reserves had—somehow—vanished.

* * *

Marasi fired three shots with the rifle, driving the bandits in the next car back under cover. *Impressive,* she thought, absently handing the weapon to Steris for reloading. She'd always used a target rifle before. You took one shot at a time with those, cocking between, but Waxillium's rifle had a wheel full of cartridges that turned on its own, like a revolver.

Steris handed back the gun, and Marasi took aim again, waiting for any bandit bits to peek out. She hid just inside the door to the servants' compartment, and the bandits hadn't made any serious attempts at advancing on her position.

Someone said something beside her. Marasi glanced into the room, where Drewton was speaking. Marasi pulled out one of her wax earplugs.

“What?” she asked.

“Are those earplugs?” the valet asked.

“What do they look like?” she said, then sighted down the rifle and fired a shot.

Drewton shoved his hands over his ears. Indeed, in the small chamber, the shot was loud enough that she was annoyed he’d made her remove her earplug.

“You carry them with you?” Drewton asked.

“Steris does.” Apparently. Marasi had been a little surprised when Steris had pulled out a pair for herself, then—an unconcerned look on her face—handed a pair to Marasi.

“So you *expected* this to happen?”

“More or less,” Marasi said, watching for movement from the bandits.

He seemed aghast. “This sort of thing happens *often*?”

“Would you say it happens often, Steris?” Marasi asked.

“Hmm?” Steris said, removing an earplug. “What was that?”

Marasi fired a shot, then looked up. *Think I winged that one.* “The valet wants to know if this sort of thing happens often to us.”

“You more than me,” Steris said conversationally. “But when Lord Waxillium is around, things *do* tend to pop up.”

“Things?” Drewton said. “Pop up? This is a rusting train robbery!”

Steris regarded the valet with a cool expression. “Didn’t you inquire about your prospective master before entering Lord Waxillium’s employ?”

“Well, I mean, I *knew* he had an interest in the constabulary. Like some lords have an interest in the symphony, or in civic matters. It seemed odd, but not ungentlemanly. I mean, it’s not as if he was involved in the *theater*.”

They’ve gone quiet over there, Marasi thought, nervously tapping one finger against the rifle barrel. Were they going to try to cross over onto the top of her car again? One of the holes in the ceiling still dripped blood from the previous attempt.

To the side, Steris clicked her tongue disapprovingly at Drewton’s words. He hadn’t done his homework, which was a dreadful sin in Steris’s eyes. Little could be worse than entering a situation without being *thorough*.

“Is … is he going to come back?” Drewton asked.

“Once he’s finished,” Steris said.

“Finished with what?”

“Killing the rest of them, hopefully,” she said.

Marasi found herself surprised at Steris’s bloodthirst. Of course, the woman hadn’t been *quite* the same since her kidnapping eighteen months back. It wasn’t that Steris acted traumatized—but she’d changed.

“They aren’t trying to get to us anymore,” Drewton said. “Did they retreat?”

“Maybe,” Marasi said. *Probably not.*

“Should we go look?” Drewton asked.

“We?”

“Well, you.” He tugged at his collar. “Gunfights. I had not actually expected gunfights. Aren’t the servants usually left out of such extravagances?”

“Most of the time,” Marasi said.

“Except when the house blew up,” Steris added.

“Except then.”

“And … you know,” Steris said.

“Best not to mention it.”

“Mention what?” Drewton asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” Marasi said, glaring at Steris. Honestly. If the man couldn’t do a little research before taking a job—

“Wait,” Drewton said, frowning. “What exactly happened to Lord Ladrian’s *previous* valet?”

Motion in the hallway again. Marasi snapped her rifle up, ready to fire. However, the person who moved out into the hallway wasn’t one of the bandits, but an older woman in a fine traveling dress. A bandit walked behind her, gun to her head.

Marasi shot him right in the forehead.

She gaped, shocked at herself, and almost dropped the gun. Fortunately the remaining bandit—seeing that the ploy hadn’t worked—ran out of the car, fleeing toward the front of the train.

Rusts! Marasi felt sweat trickle down her temple. She'd fired so quickly, without even thinking. The poor hostage stood there, blood from the dead man all over her. Marasi knew what that felt like. Yes, she did.

Beside her, Drewton let out a few oaths that would have made Harmony blush. "What were you thinking?" he demanded of her. "You could have hit the woman."

"Statistics … Statistics say…" Marasi took a deep breath. "Shut up."

"Huh?"

"Shut up." She stood, holding the gun in nervous hands, and made her way into the next car.

The woman had found her husband—alive, fortunately—and was crying in his arms. Marasi stood over the bandit corpse, then looked back out at the roof of her car, where another one lay. She *hated* this part. A year and a half working with Waxillium hadn't made killing any easier. It was unnerving, and it was such a waste! If you had to shoot a man, society had already failed.

Marasi steeled herself and did a quick check of the rooms of the first-class car, determining that the bandits had well and truly retreated. One of the first-class passengers claimed to have experience with a gun, and she handed him the rifle and set him watching to be certain no bandits returned.

From there she went to the dining car, checking on the passengers, calming them. Gunshots came from farther up the train. Waxillium was doing his job. His effective, *brutal* job. The next car up—fourth from the end—was a second-class car, with packed rooms. She checked on the people here too.

Between the two cars, she found four people who had been shot. One was dead, another seriously wounded, so Marasi went to see if Steris had, by chance, brought any bandages or medical equipment. The chances were slim, but this *was* Steris. Who knew what she had planned for?

Marasi passed Drewton, who sat morosely on a seat in one of the first-class cabins, obviously wondering how an expert cravat-tier had ended up in the middle of a virtual war zone. Steris, however, wasn't in the servants' compartment. Nor was she in the one she had been sharing with Waxillium.

Increasingly frantic, Marasi searched through the first-class rooms. No Steris. Finally, she thought to ask the man she'd posted on guard.

"Her?" he said. "Yes, miss. She went by here a few minutes ago, moving up the train. Should I have stopped her? She seemed very determined about something."

Marasi groaned. Steris must have slipped past while she was checking in the rooms of the second-class car. Frustrated, she took her rifle back and chased after her sister.

* * *

Wax's metal reserves were gone.

Wax knelt, completely stunned. This was impossible. How in Harmony's name?

He twisted, discovering that the enormous bandit had stepped into this car. Doors rattled around the man, shaking as if someone were trying violently to get out. Wax ducked into the hallway and lifted his gun, but it was flipped from his fingers by a Push. Immediately after, Wax *himself* was shoved backward by his gunbelts. He slammed into the opposite wall of the car, right next to the closed door leading toward the back of the train.

He groaned in pain. How? How had they…?

He shook his head, then heaved against the wall, using his breakaway buckles to rip free of his gunbelts. He dropped to the floor, leaving his guns and the metal vial stuck to the wall as the brute loped toward him.

Wax dodged under the man's first swing and delivered a punch right into the man's side. It felt like punching a steel wall. He danced backward, but rusts, it had been years since he'd gotten into a real fistfight—and he was slower than he'd once been. The giant's next right hook caught him as he tried to jab for the face.

His vision flashed, and his cheek erupted in pain. The blow shoved him into the side wall. *Rusts!* Where was Wayne? The brute came in again, and

Wax dodged to the side, barely, and managed to connect with the man's face. Once, twice, three quick jabs.

The brute smiled. Doors still rattled around him—he was a Coinshot, obviously, Pushing out with a bubble like the one Wax used. It even pressed a little on the metalminds Wax wore on his upper arms, which were resistant to Allomancy.

This man could have ended the fight at any moment by grabbing a bit of metal and shooting it. He *preferred* the hand-to-hand fight. Indeed, the man raised his fists and nodded to Wax, still grinning, inviting him to come in for another round.

To hell with that.

Wax turned and slammed his shoulder against a door into an empty second-class compartment and made for the window.

"Hey!" the man said behind him. *"Hey!"*

Wax leaped at the window and increased his weight. He hit the window shoulder-first, arms covering his face, and smashed through—then barely managed to catch the bottom window frame as he fell outside.

Fingers dripping blood from the broken glass, he pulled himself up, stood on the windowsill, and scaled the outside of the train, finally heaving himself onto the roof. Wind rushed around him, and he was shocked to see that he wasn't alone up here. Ahead about four cars, a group of armed men pressed toward the front of the train, bearing something large and seemingly heavy. What in the name of the lost metal was that?

"Hey!" the large bandit said again as he climbed the side of the car.

Wax sighed, then kicked the man in the face as he tried to pull himself onto the top. The man growled. Wax kicked him again, then stomped on one of his hands. The man glared at Wax, then dropped back down to the window and climbed inside.

You can beat anybody, Wayne always said, *so long as you don't let them fight back properly.*

Wax moved to the center of the train car. He felt he should be chasing down those men up ahead. But he was unarmed now, and the Coinshot below was bound to pester him.

You have what you wanted, he thought at the robbers. *Why are you still fighting?*

The brute's head appeared a moment later, peeking over the lip of the car's roof, near the rear platform, which had a ladder. Wax rushed him, preparing to kick again, but the brute climbed up too quickly. He was holding something.

One of Wax's gunbelts. Damn.

The man grinned, stepping onto the rooftop, pulling Ranette's enormous shotgun out and dropping the gunbelt. Beneath them, the train shot out of the forest and rolled toward an open bridge rising hundreds of feet above the river below.

The brute raised the shotgun as if to fire from the hip.

Excellent.

Wax dove for the rooftop as the brute pulled the trigger, and the massive kick Ranette had built into the gun took him entirely by surprise. The weapon ripped out of his fingers, jerking backward and falling down between the cars. The man howled, cradling his hand.

Wax tackled him in the chest. The man grunted, stumbling backward, but caught himself before he toppled off the train. Wax didn't care.

He was after the gunbelt, which had fallen at the man's feet. He snatched it with fingers still wet with blood. It held Ranette's two cord devices, along with a single, glorious metal vial.

Wax yanked it out, tucking the gunbelt into his waistband. However, the vial lurched in his fingers. He snatched it, holding on tightly, but the brute's Push sent him backward across the train's roof in a skid. He slipped and fell to his knees, catching the side of the train.

The Coinshot kept Pushing. Wax clung to the rooftop with his left hand, but his right arm—which held the metal vial—strained in its socket. The brute smiled and started walking forward. Each step closer let him Push harder.

Wax gritted his teeth. The cuts on his fingers were superficial, though they stung like hell and the blood made his grip slippery. He struggled, trying to pull the vial toward his mouth, but failed.

Ranette's sphere devices. They hung from the gunbelt tucked into his waist. Could he use those? How? Beneath him, the train started across the bridge.

The thug advanced on Wax, rolling his shoulder and trying to make a fist despite his broken thumb. Behind the man something moved on the ladder. A head coming up? Wayne!

No. He saw the tip of a gun wave as the person climbed. Wayne wouldn't have a gun. Marasi?

Steris appeared at the lip of the roof, wind blowing her hair wildly. She looked from the huge robber to Wax, then seemed to gasp—though the wind was too loud for Wax to hear it. She scrambled up and set herself, crouching on one knee, holding Ranette's shotgun.

Oh no.

"Steris!" he shouted.

The brute spun, noticing her as she set the gun at her shoulder, wide-eyed, dress rippling against her body in the wind.

She pulled the trigger. Unsurprisingly, the shot went wild, but it did manage to clip the brute in the arm, spraying blood. The man grunted, releasing his Push on Wax.

Unfortunately, the enormous kick of that gun—intended to be used to fight Allomancers—hurled Steris backward.

And right off the side of the train.

8

Wax leaped off the side of the train and raised the vial to his mouth.

Steris toppled below, falling toward the river. He ripped the cork free with his teeth and turned over in the air, sucking down the contents of the vial. Cod-liver oil and metal flakes washed into his mouth. Swallowing took a precious moment.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Power.

Wax shouted, flaring steel and Pushing on the tracks up above. He shot downward in a blur, slamming into Steris, grabbed her, and Pushed on the shotgun that toppled beneath her.

It hit the water.

They slowed immediately. Water viscosity being what it was, you could Push off something sinking. A second later, the shotgun hit the bottom of the churning river, and that left the two of them hanging about two feet above the water's surface. A faint, solitary blue line led from Wax to the shotgun.

Steris breathed in short, frantic gasps. She clung to him, blinked, then looked down at the river.

“What is *wrong* with that gun!” she said.

“It’s meant for me to shoot,” Wax said, “when my weight is increased to counteract the kick.” He looked up toward the disappearing train. It had crossed the river, but now would have to slow and chug its way down some switchbacks on a hill on the other side, coming out of the highlands to head on toward New Seran.

“Hold this,” he told Steris, handing her his gunbelt and removing the two spheres. “What were you thinking? I told you to stay back in the other car.”

“As a point of fact,” she said, “you did *not*. You told me to stay safe.”

“So?”

“So, it has been my experience that the safest place in a gunfight is near you, Lord Waxillium.”

He grunted. “Hold your breath.”

“What? Why should I—”

She yelped as he Pushed on the steel bridge supports nearby, plunging them down into the river. Ice-cold water surrounded them as Wax kept Pushing, plunging downward until he reached his gun—easily located by its blue line—settled into the muck on the bottom. Ears throbbing from the pressure, he snatched the gun, replacing it with one of Ranette’s sphere devices, then Pushed.

They popped back out of the river, trailing water, and Wax Pushed them as high as his anchor would allow and handed Steris the shotgun to hold. From there, he Pushed off one of the support beams below—launching them upward and to the side. A Push on one from the other direction sent them bounding upward the other way, and he was able to work them toward the top of the bridge.

The angle of these Pushes had sent them out away from the tracks, unfortunately. When they soared up past the bridge, he needed to sling Ranette’s other sphere device out—getting it into a small gap between bridge struts. He engaged the hooks, so that the Push from below, combined with the taut cord in his hand, swung him and Steris in an arc.

He landed on the tracks, a soggy Steris in one arm, cord in the other. He could imagine Ranette's grin as he told her how well the thing had worked. He disengaged the hooks and yanked the device back into his hand, though he had to wind the cord manually.

Steris's teeth chattered audibly, and he glanced at her as he finished winding, expecting to see her frightened and miserable. Instead, despite being dripping wet, she had a stupid grin on her face, eyes alight with excitement.

Wax couldn't help smiling himself as he stowed Ranette's sphere and tied on his gunbelt, then shoved his shotgun into the holster. "Remember, you're not supposed to find things like that fun, Steris. You're *supposed* to be boring. I have it on good authority from this woman I know."

"A tone-deaf man," Steris said, "can still enjoy a good choir—even if he could never participate."

"Not buying the act, my dear," Wax said. "Not any longer. You just climbed on top of a moving train car and shot a bandit, rescuing your fiancé."

"It behooves a woman," she said, "to show an interest in her husband's hobbies. Though I suppose I should be outraged, as this is the second dunking you've given me in a very short period of time, Lord Waxillium."

"I thought you said the first one wasn't my fault."

"Yes, but this was twice as cold. So it evens out."

He smiled. "You want to wait here, or join me?"

"Um … join you?"

He nodded to the left. Far below, the train hit the end of its switchbacks down the hillside, leveling out to approach the final bend before heading southward. Her eyes opened wider, then she grabbed him in a tight grip.

"When we land," he said, "keep your head down and find a place to hide."

"Got it."

He took a deep breath, then launched them high in a powerful arc through the night air. They sailed across the river, coming down like a bird of prey toward the front of the train.

Wax slowed himself and Steris with a careful Push on the engine, setting down atop the coal tender. Inside the cab right in front of them, a bandit held a gun to the engineer's head. Wax let go of Steris, then spun around and pumped the shotgun—popping the expended shells into the air—and Pushed on the shells, sending them through the back of the engine cab and right into the bandit's head. She dropped, falling on the engine controls.

Wax was nearly thrown off as the train lurched, slowing down. He spun, grabbing Steris by the arm. To his right, the startled engineer grabbed the lever, smoothing out the deceleration. Holding Steris to him, Wax leaped with a short Push into the open rear of the engine, where they landed beside the engineer and the dead bandit.

"What are they doing?" he asked, dropping Steris, then kneeling and taking the dead bandit's pistol.

"They have some device," the engineer said, frantic, pointing. "They're installing it between the coal tender and the first car. Shot my fireman when he tried to defend me, the bastards!"

"Where's the next town?"

"Ironstand! We're getting close. Few more minutes."

"Get us there as quickly as you can, and call for some surgeons and the local constables the moment we arrive."

The man nodded frantically. Wax closed his eyes and took a deep breath to orient himself.

The final push. Here we go.

* * *

Halfway through the train, Marasi had reason to curse Waxillium Ladrian. Well, *another* reason. She added it to the list.

Though she was supposed to be finding Steris, she spent most of her time being mobbed by worried passengers who needed soothing. Apparently the bandits had quickly worked their way through the second- and third-class cars, shaking people down for what little money they had. The people were terrified, upset, and looking for anyone with a hint of authority to comfort them.

Marasi did her best, settling them onto benches, checking to see if any more people were seriously wounded. She helped bandage a young man who had stood up to a bandit, and now bore a shot in the side as a result. He might make it.

Passengers had seen Steris come through here. Marasi tried to contain her worry and peeked into the next car in the line. It was deserted save for one passenger standing calmly at the far end, cane in hand, blocking the passage.

Marasi checked the various rooms as she entered, rifle held at the ready, but spotted no bandits. This was the last car before the cargo cars—which, oddly, were at the front of this train. This car's interior showed its share of bullet holes in the woodwork, suggesting Waxillium had been here.

"Sir?" Marasi asked, hastening to the lone man. He was slender, and younger than she'd expected him to be from behind, considering how his posture slumped, and how he relied upon the cane to keep him upright. "Sir, it's not safe for you here. You should move to the rear cars."

He turned toward her with raised eyebrows. "I am always inclined to obey the wishes of a pretty woman," he said. She could see that he kept one hand stiff at his side, fingers closed as if clutching something. "But what of you, miss? Is there no danger to you?"

"I can care for myself," Marasi said, noting that the next car in line was crowded with corpses. She felt sick.

"Indeed!" the man said. "You look quite capable. Quite capable indeed." He leaned in. "Are you more than you appear, perhaps? A Metalborn?"

Marasi frowned at the odd question. She'd taken a dose of cadmium, of course—for all the good it would do. Her Allomancy was generally something to laugh at; she could slow down time in a bubble around herself, which meant speeding it up for everyone else.

A wonderful power if you were bored and waiting for the play to start. But it wasn't of so much use in combat, where you'd be left frozen in place while your enemies could escape, or just set themselves up to shoot you when the bubble dropped. True, she could make the bubble fairly large, so she could catch others inside of it—but that would still leave her trapped, and likely with hostiles.

The man smiled at her, then abruptly raised his hand, the one that appeared to be clutching something. Marasi started to react, bringing her rifle up. But at that moment, the train unexpectedly lurched, slowing as if someone had leaned on the brake. The man cursed, stumbling and slamming into the wall before falling to the floor. Marasi caught herself, but dropped the rifle.

She looked at the man, who regarded her with wide eyes before maladroitly stumbling to his feet—one of his legs didn't work right—and hastening out of the train car onto the platform, slamming the door behind him.

Marasi stared after him, confused. She'd assumed he was pulling a gun on her, but that hadn't been the case at all. The object had been far too small. She reached for her gun, and beside it on the floor she was surprised to find a small metal cube with bizarre symbols on it.

Gunfire sounded ahead. Marasi tucked the curiosity away and shouldered her rifle, determined to find Waxillium and, hopefully, her stupid sister.

* * *

Eyes closed, Wax felt the metal burning. That fire, comfortable and familiar. Metal was his soul. Compared to it, the chill of the river was no more than a raindrop on a bonfire.

He felt the gun in his fingers. A bandit's gun, unfamiliar to him, yet he knew it—knew it by the lines pointing at its barrel, trigger, levers, the bullets inside. Five shots left. He could see them even with his eyes closed.

Go.

He opened his eyes and leaped out of the engine, Pushing himself forward in a rush. He passed over the coal tender, then burst into the first cargo car—laden with mail in heaping sacks—and passed through in a tempest. He skidded out onto its rear platform and Pushed to either side, launching two bandit guards upward and outward, one in each direction.

The train ran up beside the river here. Trees blurred past on the left, water on the right. Wax launched himself upward, onto the top of the second cargo car, noting the bandits with their device here. Another, larger group had gathered on top of the next car, the one they'd robbed.

Wax fired with cold precision, killing the three bandits. He stepped up to the "device" the engineer had mentioned, which was nothing more than a large case of dynamite and a trigger linked to a clock. Wax ripped the detonator off, tossed it aside, then Pushed the entire box away to be sure. It plunged into the river.

Something Pushed his gun out of his hand. He spun, finding the large bandit from before lumbering toward him across the roof. He'd left the larger group of bandits on the next rooftop over.

You again, Wax thought with a growl, dropping his gunbelt, but resting his foot on it to keep it from blowing away. The man came running toward Wax. With the brute very close, Wax knelt and yanked out Ranette's sphere device.

The bandit Pushed on that, of course—causing the sphere to leap backward to the side. Wax kept a firm hold on the cord, wrapping it with a yank around the bandit's leg.

The bandit stared down in confusion.

Wax Pushed, shoving the sphere into a batch of trees, engaging its hooks. "I believe this is your stop."

The large man suddenly *flew* off the train, yanked by the cord—which was now hooked to a tree. Wax picked up his gunbelt and advanced on the larger group of bandits, wind whipping around him on the rooftop.

He was facing down at least a dozen of them—and he had no weapon. Fortunately, the group was busy throwing one of their members off the train.

Wax blinked in surprise. But that was indeed what they were doing—they tossed one of the bandits overboard. It was the man with the cane, who hit the water beside the train with a splash. A group of the others started to follow suit, leaping into the river. One spotted Wax, pointing. Six remaining bandits leveled weapons.

Then froze.

Wax hesitated, the wind at his back. The men didn’t move. Didn’t flinch. Didn’t even blink. Wax hopped across to the next car, then took a cork from his pocket—from one of his vials—and tossed it toward the men.

It hit some invisible barrier and froze there, hanging in the air. Wax grinned, then dropped down between the cars and pushed into the one the men were standing on. There he found Marasi standing atop a bunch of suitcases, her shoulders pressed against the train’s ceiling just below the men so she could engage a speed bubble and freeze them all in place.

9

Wax had never shot a doctor before, but he *did* like trying out new experiences. Perhaps today would be the day.

“I’m fine,” he growled as the woman dabbed with cotton at the wound on his face, where the massive brute had punched him. His lip had split.

“I’ll decide that,” she said.

Nearby, the Ironstand constables marched four befuddled bandits along the train platform, which was flooded with light from a few tall arc lamps. Wax sat on a bench near where the other surgeons were attending to the wounded. Farther back, in the shadows of the night, a tarp covered the bodies they’d retrieved. There were far too many of those.

“It looks worse than it is,” Wax said.

“You had blood all over your face, my lord.”

“I wiped my forehead with a bloody hand.” She had wrapped that hand with gauze already, but had agreed that the cuts were superficial.

Finally she stepped back and sighed, nodding. Wax stood up, grabbing his damp suit coat and striding toward the train. He saw Marasi peering out of the front. She shook her head.

No sign of Wayne or MeLaan.

The lump inside Wax's stomach grew two sizes. *Wayne'll be fine,* he told himself. *He can heal from practically anything.* But there *were* ways to kill a Bloodmaker. A shot to the back of the head. Prolonged suffocation. Basically, anything that would have forced Wayne to keep healing until his Feruchemical storages ran out.

And, of course, there was the *other* thing. The strange effect that had somehow stolen Wax's Allomantic powers. If that worked on Feruchemy too …

Wax strode onto the train, stepping past Marasi without saying a word, and started his own search. The train was dark, now that it had stopped—and the only lights came from the platform outside. There wasn't much to see by.

"Lord Waxillium?" Constable Matieu said, sticking his head in between two of the cars. The spindly man had a ready smile, which fell off his face as Wax bustled past.

"Busy," Wax said, entering the next car.

Blue lines let him see sources of metal even in the darkness. Wayne would be carrying metal vials and his bracers. *Look for faint sources of metal, hidden behind something.* Perhaps … perhaps they'd just knocked him out and stuffed him somewhere.

"Um…" the constable said from behind. "I was wondering if any of your other servants will be needing, um, emotional support."

Wax frowned, looking out the window to where Drewton was sitting, surrounded by no fewer than three nurses. He accepted a cup of tea from one while he complained about his ordeal. Wax could hear it even inside the train car.

"No," Wax said. "Thank you."

Matieu followed him through the train. He was the local captain, though from what Wax gathered, this town was small enough that his "big cases" usually were on the order of who had been stealing Mrs. Hutchen's milk off her doorstep. He was glad to have found surgeons. Most of them probably worked half their time on cows, but it was better than nothing.

Not a few younger officers stood on the platform. They'd put away their stupid autograph books, fortunately, though they seemed deflated that their captain wouldn't let them pester Wax.

Where? Wax thought, feeling more and more sick. Marasi arrived a moment later with an oil lamp, her light illuminating the train car for him as he poked through a cargo room full of mail bags.

He won't be in here, Wax thought. This was forward of the car that had been secretly carrying the payroll shipment. Wayne wouldn't have been able to cross through that one; they'd have had it blocked off even before the bandits arrived. Still, he wanted to be careful. He searched this one, then waved to Marasi and picked his way through the wreckage of the car that had been robbed.

Matieu tagged along. "I have to say, Lord Waxillium, that we're *very* lucky you were aboard. The Nightstreet Gang has been growing bolder and bolder, but I never thought they'd try something like this!"

"So this *is* an established gang?" Marasi said.

"Oh, sure," Matieu said. "Everyone in the area knows about the Nightstreets, though mostly they hit cities closer to the Roughs. We figure it's slim pickings out past the mountains, so they have begun to venture inward. But this! A full-on train robbery? And stealing Erikell payroll? That's daring. Those folks make weapons, you know."

"They had at least one Allomancer with them," Wax said, leading the way through the empty courier car, which still smelled faintly of formaldehyde.

"I hadn't heard that," Matieu said. "Even luckier you were along!"

"I didn't stop them from getting away, or from stealing the payroll."

"You killed or captured a good *half* of them, my lord. The ones we've got, they'll give us a lead on the others." He hesitated. "We'll have to put together a posse, my lord. They'll be making for the Roughs. Sure could use your help."

Wax swept this room, focusing on the blue lines. "And the man with the limp?"

"My lord?"

"He seemed to be in charge of them," Wax said. "A man in a fine suit who walked with a cane. About six feet tall, with a narrow face and dark hair. Who is he?"

"I don't know that one, my lord. Donny is the leader."

"Big guy?" Wax asked. "Neck like a stump?"

"No, my lord. Donny is little and feisty. Evilest rusting kig you've ever seen."

Kig. It was slang for a koloss-blooded person. Wax hadn't seen anyone among the bandits with the proper skin color for that. "Thank you, Captain," Wax said.

The man seemed to recognize it as a dismissal, but he hesitated. "And can we count on your help, my lord? When we chase down Donny and his gang?"

"I'll … let you know."

Matieu saluted, which was completely inappropriate—Wax wasn't part of this jurisdiction—and retreated. Wax continued searching, pulling open a luggage compartment beneath the first passenger car. The metal lines leading into it only pointed at a few pieces of baggage.

"Waxillium," Marasi said, "you can't help with their hunt. We have a job already."

"Might be related."

"Might not be," she said. "You heard him, Waxillium. These guys are a known criminal element."

"Who happened to rob the very train we were on."

"But at the same time seemed utterly shocked by the presence of an Allomancer gunman in the last car. Instead of tossing dynamite at us and riddling the coach with bullets, they sent a couple men to rob what they assumed would be easy pickings."

Wax chewed on that, then checked another luggage compartment, bracing himself as he did so. No bodies. He let out a breath.

"I can't think about this right now," he said.

She nodded in understanding. They checked the other compartments, and he didn't see any suspicious lines, so they moved on. Crossing the space between cars, he spotted Steris watching him. She sat alone on a bench with a blanket around her shoulders, holding a cup of something that steamed. She seemed perfectly calm.

He continued on. Losing friends was part of a lawman's life; it had happened to him more times than he wanted to count. But after what had happened back in the city six months ago … well, he wasn't sure what losing Wayne would do to him. He steeled himself, moved to the next car, and opened the first of its luggage compartments, then froze.

Faint steel lines coming from another place in this train car. They were *moving*.

Wax rushed toward them. Marasi followed, suddenly alert, her lamp held high. The lines were coming from the floor inside one of the rooms. Only no luggage was on its racks, and no litter was on its floor. It was a private compartment that hadn't been rented out for the trip.

Wax entered and ripped open the luggage compartment in the floor. Wayne blinked up at him. The younger man had mussed hair, and his shirt was unbuttoned, but he wasn't in any bonds that Wax could see. He didn't seem to have been harmed at all. In fact …

Wax crouched down, Marasi's light revealing what had been hidden to him by the overhang of the luggage compartment. MeLaan, shirt completely off, was in the compartment too. She sat up, entirely unashamed of her nudity.

"We've stopped!" she said. "Are we there already?"

* * *

"Well how was I supposed to know we'd get rusting attacked?" Wayne exclaimed, now properly clothed, though his hair was still a mess.

Wax sat listening with half an ear. The train officials had opened a room in the station for them to use. He knew he should be angry, but he was mostly just relieved.

“Because we are *us*,” Marasi said, arms folded. “Because we’re on our way to a dangerous situation. I don’t know. You could at *least* have told us what you were doing.” She hesitated. “And by the way, what do you *think you were doing*?”

Wayne bowed his head where he sat before her. MeLaan leaned against the wall near the door. She was looking toward the ceiling, as if trying to feign innocence.

“Movin’ on,” Wayne said, pointing at Marasi. “Like you told me to.”

“That wasn’t moving on! That was ‘Running on at full speed.’ It was ‘Shooting on forward like a bullet,’ Wayne.”

“I don’t like doin’ stuff halfway,” he said solemnly, hand over his heart. “It’s been a long time since I had me a good neckin’ on account of my diligent monogamous idealization of a beauteous but unavailable—”

“And *how,*” Marasi interrupted, “did you *not* hear the fight? There was gunfire, Wayne. Practically *on top of you*.”

“Well, see,” he said, growing red, “we was *real* busy. And we were down next to the tracks, which made a lot of noise. We’d wanted a place what was private-like, you know, and…” He shrugged.

“Bah!” Marasi said. “Do you *realize* how worried Waxillium was?”

“Don’t bring me into this,” Wax said, seated with his feet up on the next bench.

“Oh, and you *approve* of this behavior?” Marasi asked, turning on him.

“Heavens, no,” Wax said. “If I approved of half the things Wayne does, Harmony would probably strike me dead on the spot. But he’s alive, and we’re alive, and we can’t blame him for getting distracted during what we assumed would be a simple ride.”

Marasi eyed him, then sighed and walked back out onto the platform, passing MeLaan without a glance.

Wayne stood and wandered over to him, pulling his box of gum from his pocket and tapping it against his palm to settle the powder inside. “These thieves, did one of them happen to shoot her when you weren’t lookin’? ’Cuz she’s sure gotten stiff all of a sudden.”

“She was just worried about you,” Wax said. “I’ll talk to her after she’s cooled down.”

MeLaan left her position by the door. “Was there anything strange about the attack?”

“Plenty of things,” Wax said, standing and stretching. Rusts. Was he really getting too old for all this, as Lessie always joked with him? He usually felt exhilarated after a fight.

It’s the deaths, he thought. Only one passenger had died, an older man. But they’d lost half a dozen payroll guards, not to mention the many wounded.

“One of the bandits,” he said to MeLaan, “he did something that dampened my Allomancy.”

“A Leecher?” she asked.

Wax shook his head. “He didn’t touch me.”

Leechers who burned chromium could blank another Allomancer’s metals—but it required touch. “It did feel the same. My steel was there one moment, then gone the next. But MeLaan, there was some kind of device involved. A little metal cube.”

“Wait,” a voice said. Marasi appeared in the doorway. “A *cube*?”

All three of them looked at her, and she blushed in the harsh electric light. “What?”

“You stalked away,” Wayne pointed, “indigenously.”

“And now I’m stalking back in,” Marasi said, striding toward Wax and fishing in her pocket. “I can be indigen—indig*nant* in here just as easily.” She pulled her hand out, holding a small metal cube.

The same cube he’d seen before his steel was drained. Wax plucked it from her palm. “Where’d you get this?”

“The guy with the cane dropped it,” Marasi said. “He moved as if to pull a gun on me, and raised this.”

Wax turned it toward MeLaan, and she shook her head.

“That’s a *real* strange gun,” Wayne noted.

“Is there anything in that lore VenDell talked about,” Wax said, “that mentions a device that negates Allomancy?”

“Nothing I’ve heard,” MeLaan said.

“I mean,” Wayne said, “it ain’t even got a barrel.”

“But you said you don’t pay attention to the research, MeLaan,” Marasi said, taking the cube back.

“That’s true.”

“And if they could shoot the rusting thing,” Wayne added, “the bullet would be small as a flea.”

Marasi sighed. “Wayne, can’t you ever let a joke die?”

“Hon, that joke *started* dead,” he said. “I’m just givin’ it a proper burial.”

“We need another train south,” Marasi said, turning to the others.

“These bandits might have information,” Wayne said. “Chasin’ them down could be useful. ’Sides, I didn’t get to stomp none of them, on account of some untimely snogging.”

“At least it was *good* snogging,” MeLaan added. Then, to Marasi’s glare, she added, “What? It was. Poor guy hadn’t had a proper snog in years. Had a lot of pent-up energy.”

“You’re not even human,” Marasi said. “You should be ashamed. *Not to mention* that you’re six hundred years old.”

“I’m young at heart. Really—I copied this one off a sixteen-year-old that I ate a few months back.”

The room grew very still.

“Oh … was that gauche?” MeLaan said, wincing. “That *was* gauche, wasn’t it? She didn’t taste very good, if that’s anything to you. Hardly rotten at all. And … I should stop talking about this. New Seran? Are we going, or staying to chase bandits?”

“Going,” Wax said, which earned a nod from Marasi. “If this is connected, we’ll run into them later. If it’s not, then I’ll see what I can do to help once we’ve dealt with my uncle.”

“And how’re we going to get to New Seran?” Wayne said. “Doesn’t look like our train will be leaving anytime soon.”

“Freight train,” Wax said, checking the wall lists. “Coming through in an hour. They’re going to move our train onto the repair track, so we can flag that one down for a ride. It won’t be comfortable, but it will get us there by morning. Go gather your luggage. Hopefully there aren’t too many holes in it.”

Wayne and MeLaan obeyed, walking out side by side. Maybe there was actually something there between them. If anything, Wayne didn’t seem the least bit put out by being reminded just how alien, and just how old, MeLaan was.

Then again, Wayne wasn’t known for his taste in women. Or, well, his *taste* at all, really. Wax glanced at Marasi, who had remained behind. She held up the little cube, turning it over in her fingers, inspecting the intricate carvings it bore on its various faces.

“Can I get VenDell’s notes back from you?” she said. “Maybe there’s something in them about this thing.”

“More convinced this wasn’t a random train robbery?”

“Maybe a little,” Marasi said. “You should talk to my sister.”

“She seemed perfectly calm when I checked on her earlier.”

“Of course she’s calm,” Marasi said. “She’s Steris. But she’s *also* doing needlework.”

“… And that’s bad?”

“Steris only does needlework when she has an overwhelming desire to appear normal,” Marasi said. “She read somewhere that it’s an appropriate hobby for a woman of means. She hates it to death, but won’t tell a soul. Trust me. If needlework is involved, she’s upset. I could talk to her, but she’s never listened to me. She didn’t even know about me until we were teenagers. Besides, you’ll need to get used to this.”

She strode from the room, and Wax—oddly—found himself smiling. Whatever else could be said, Marasi had come a long way since he’d first met her.

He took his jacket off the hook on the wall and slipped it on, then walked back into the night. Marasi was calling for the stationmaster, probably to arrange their passage on the cargo train. Wax strolled along the tracks, passing cold electric lights, until he reached the bench where Steris worked on her needlepoint.

He settled down beside her. “Marasi says you’re having a tough time of it.”

Steris paused her needlepoint. “You’re a very straightforward man, Lord Waxillium.”

“Can be.”

“But as we both know, it’s all an act. You were raised among Elendel’s elite. You had tutors and diction coaches. In your youth, you spent your time at parties and balls.”

“And then I spent twenty years in the Roughs,” Wax said. “The winds out there can weather the strongest granite. Are you surprised they can do the same to a man?”

She turned to him, head cocked to the side.

Wax sighed and leaned back, stretching his legs out, ankles crossed. “Have you ever been somewhere you didn’t fit in? A place where everyone else seems to get it immediately? They know what to do. They know what to say. But rusts, you have to *work* to untangle it all?”

“That describes my entire life,” Steris said softly.

He put his arm around her, and let her rest her head on his shoulder. “Well, that was how those parties were for me. Social situations were a chore. Everyone laughing, and me just standing there, stressed out of my mind and trying to figure out the right thing to do. I didn’t smile a lot back then. Guess I still don’t. I’d escape the parties when I could, find my way to a quiet balcony.”

“And do what? Read?”

Wax chuckled. “No. I don’t mind a book now and then, but Wayne is the real reader.”

Steris raised her head, looking surprised.

“I’m serious,” Wax said. “Granted, he likes ones with pictures now and then, but he *does* read. Often out loud. You should hear him do the voices to himself. Me … I’d just find a balcony that looked out over the city somewhere, and I’d stare. Listen.” He smiled. “When I was a boy, more than a few people thought I was slow because I’d sit there staring out a window.”

“Then you found your way to the Roughs.”

“I was so glad to be away from Elendel and its phoniness. You call me blunt. Well, that’s the man I want to be. That’s the man I admire. Perhaps I’m only acting like him, but it’s a sincere act. Hang me, but it is.”

Steris sat quietly for a few moments, head on his shoulder, and Wax stared out into the night. A nice night, all things considered.

“You’re wrong,” she noted, sounding drowsy. “You do smile. Most often when you’re flying on lines of steel. It’s the only time I think … I think I see … pure joy in you.…”

He looked down at her, but she’d apparently dozed off, judging by the way she was breathing. He settled back, thinking about what she’d said, until the cargo train finally pulled into the station.

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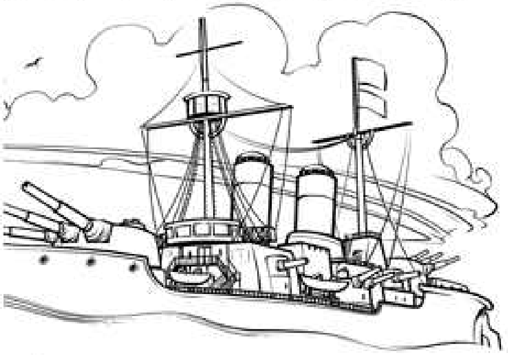

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Does Harmony Have a Metal?

The First Age philosopher Galabris Menthon meant this rhetorically, but even the Lord Mistborn thought on this when he famously said, "Having the has Sazed a metal?"

From councils to pubs, the question is still debated. But now, breakthroughs in science have brought us closer to an answer.

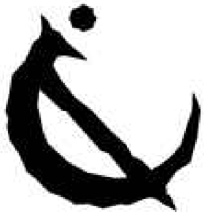
(Continued on back.)

FARTHING MANSION HIT!

An act of vandalism and thievery has the city's elite on edge. Late last night, someone broke into Farthing Mansion, stole some items, and vandalised the wall with a reverse gold symbol.

Lady Farthing is offering a reward for the return of her jewelry. Please report all information to the Uptown Precinct.

(Continued on back.)



The mark of the vandal

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Soother's Choice is the ONLY choice.

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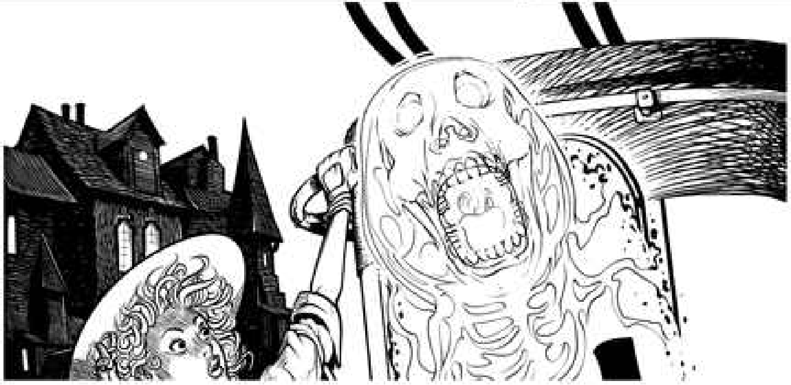

part could have avoided this whole debacle, and you wouldn't be hanging fifty feet above death from the threads of a poorly-rendered map. Climb in. Let's come to an agreement."

He reached up as if to take my offer, but something in his hand flashed in the light of the stars. Instinctively, I burnt metal, releasing one hand to touch the device.

It was an everyday hunting knife.

"Politeness," he said with a grumble. "That's not how

10

Wax started awake to the sound of distant explosions.

He immediately scrambled to his feet, reaching for his metals, bleary-eyed and disoriented. Where was he? Crew cabin of the cargo train. It was large, with some stiff couches in the back for the engineers to catch a nap while their train was waiting to be unloaded. Steris was asleep on one, wrapped in his jacket. Wayne dozed in the corner, hat over his face.

They'd left the servants behind for now; they would come along on the next passenger train. MeLaan had chosen to ride in the back with their luggage—she had wanted to look through her bundles of bones to pick the right body for the night.

Wax downed metals and whipped out Vindication, stumbling forward toward the sounds—which, now fully awake, he wasn't certain were explosions at all. A continuous rumble, like an earthquake, off in the distance. He stepped out into the cab proper of the engine car. This was a newer machine, one of the oil-driven ones, with no need for a coal tender.

Marasi stood near the front with the engineer, a tall fellow with bright eyes and forearms like pistons.

That rumbling … Wax frowned, lowering his gun as Marasi glanced at him. The sky was bright blue; morning had arrived. He stepped into the cabin, and could see that ahead, New Seran rose before them. The city spread across a series of enormous, flat-topped stone terraces. There were at least a dozen of them, and each was split by multiple streams, which crossed them and then dropped off the edge down to the next terrace. The sound wasn't an earthquake or explosion, but that of *waterfalls*.

In places, the drop was just a little ripple—a fall of some five feet or so. But in others, majestic waterfalls plunged fifty feet or more before pounding onto the next stone platform. It looked like a man-made effect, for the various split streams and waterfalls eventually ran back together into the river, which flowed away from the city toward distant Elendel.

Wax slid Vindication into her holster, though it took two tries because he was so mesmerized by the waterfalls. Indeed, the whole city. Buildings sprouted between the rivers, and vibrant green vines draped the cliffs like nature's own tresses. Beyond, the Seran mountains rose, lofty and whited at the tops.

Marasi grinned, leaning out of the cab to get a better look up at the heights of the city. The engineer stood by his levers, valves, and cranks trying to act casual, though he was obviously watching Wax and Marasi for their reactions.

"I often think," the man eventually said, "that Harmony was showing off a little when He made this place."

"I had no idea this was here," Wax said, stepping up beside Marasi. Behind him, Wayne yawned and stumbled to his feet.

"Yeah, well," the engineer said, "people from Elendel often forget there's a whole country out here. No offense, my lord. There's a lot of Elendel to take in, so it makes sense you'd get a little blinded by it."

"You're from New Seran?" Marasi asked.

"Born and raised, Captain Colms."

"Then you can tell us where to find our hotel, perhaps?" Marasi asked. "The Copper Gate?"

“Oh, that’s a *nice* one,” the engineer said, pointing. “Top terrace, in the waterman district. Look for the big statue of the Lord Mistborn. It’s not two blocks from there.”

“How close can you get us?” Marasi asked.

“Not close at all, I’m afraid,” the engineer said. “We’re not a passenger train, and even those can only go to the middle tiers. We’ll be down at the bottom. It’ll take you a few hours to ride the gondolas up. There are ramps too, if you’d prefer a carriage, but they take longer—and the gondolas have a better view.”

Gondolas would have been wonderful, Wax thought, if most of them had had more than a few hours of sleep. With the reception tonight, they’d need to be rested and ready to go.

“Shortcut?” he asked Marasi.

“You realize I’m wearing a skirt.”

“I do. What happened to that fancy new constable uniform with the trousers?”

“Packed away. Not everyone likes wearing uniforms when we don’t have to, Waxillium.”

“Well, you can wait and take the gondolas,” Wax said. “Think of me resting peacefully in a soft hotel bed while you blink bleary eyes and droop against—”

“All right, *fine,*” Marasi said, stepping up to him. “Just stay away from crowds.”

Wax grabbed her around the waist. “I’ll be back for the rest of you,” he told Wayne, who nodded. “Engineer, have our things sent to the Copper Gate, if you please.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Wax slid open the side of the cab, took another drink of metal flakes—recovered from the stash in his luggage—then pulled Marasi tight, burned steel, and leaped. A flared Push sent them soaring away from the train, which was slowing as it approached the buildings clustered around the base of New Seran.

They dropped toward these, but a shot from Vindication as they neared the ground gave him something to bounce off of. He sent them upward, past the lower tiers, using metal he found there to keep them aloft.

The homes here were much smaller than those in Elendel. Quaint, even. In Elendel, you could rarely afford to waste space on a single dwelling—even in the slums, towering apartments were the norm. There was a kind of eternal shift going on, where sections of town would fall into disrepair over time, filling with the poor while those able to afford something new moved to other sections. It was fascinating to him that, if you looked at old maps, what were now slums had once been considered prime real estate.

He saw few apartment buildings and only three skyscrapers, confined to a small commercial district on the top terrace. Though the terraces constrained the city's boundaries, they looked large enough to hold the population. Lots of parks and small streams, none deep enough to be navigable like Elendel's canals.

He stayed to the rooftops, rather than the streets, for Marasi's sake—though she didn't have much trouble with her skirt. She'd tucked it around her legs before they started, and the generally upward motion kept it from flaring.

Wax threw the two of them in great leaping arcs over residential areas until they reached the next cliff face, where he found a gondola and used it as an anchor to shoot them up the fifty feet or so toward the top tier of the terraces. He exulted in the moment, the freedom, the beauty of it. There was a majesty about soaring alongside a churning waterfall, with sparkling pools and lush gardens spreading out beneath.

They topped the cliff face, and Wax landed them softly alongside the falls. Marasi let out a held breath as he set her down; he could tell from the tension of her grip that she hadn't enjoyed the flight as much as he had. Steelpushing wasn't natural to her, nor were the heights—she backed away from the cliff as soon as she was free.

"Going to go get the others?" she asked.

“Let’s find the hotel first,” Wax said, pointing the way toward a statue he’d spotted upon landing. He could still make out the green patina of the statue’s head over the tops of the nearby homes. He started in that direction.

Marasi joined him, and they entered a street with a fair amount of foot traffic, papergirls and boys hawking broadsheets at every corner. Fewer horses or carriages than in Elendel—almost none, though he did see a fair number of pedicabs. That made sense, with the layout of the city. He found it interesting that the gondola system wasn’t only for getting between terraces; there were also lines crossing the sky above them carting people from one section of this terrace to another.

“Like a shark among minnows,” Marasi mumbled.

“What’s that?” Wax asked.

“Look at how people swerve around you,” Marasi said. “Lord Cimines once did a study comparing constables to sharks, showing how the people in a crowded walkway responded exactly the same way as animals do to a predator moving nearby.”

He hadn’t noticed, but she was right. People gave him a wide berth—though not because they guessed he was a constable. It was the mistcoat duster, the weapons, and perhaps his height. Everyone seemed a little shorter down here, and he saw over the crowd by several inches.

In Elendel, his clothing had been abnormal—but so was everyone’s. That city was a mishmash, like an old barrel full of spent cartridges. All different calibers represented.

Here, the people wore lighter clothing than in Elendel. Pastel dresses for the ladies, striped white suits and boater hats for the men. Compared to them, he was a bullet hole in a stained-glass window.

“Never been good at blending in anyway,” he said.

“Fair enough,” Marasi said. “I’ve been meaning to ask. Do you need Wayne tonight?”

“At the party?” Wax asked, amused. “I have trouble imagining a situation where he doesn’t end up drunk in the punch bowl.”

“Then I’ll borrow him,” Marasi said. “I want to check the graveyards for ReLuur’s spike.”

Wax grunted. “That will be dirty work.”

“Which *is* why I asked for Wayne.”

“Noted. What do you think the chances are you’ll find the thing buried in a grave?”

Marasi shrugged. “I figure we’ll start with the most obvious and easiest method.”

“Grave robbing is the easiest method?”

“It is with proper preparation,” Marasi said. “I don’t intend to do the digging, after all.…”

Wax stopped listening.

The chatter of the crowd faded as he froze in place, staring at a broadsheet held up by a papergirl on a nearby corner. That symbol, the jagged reverse *mah* … he knew that symbol all too well. He left Marasi midsentence, pushing through the crowd to the girl and snatching the paper.

That symbol. Impossible. FARTHING MANSION HIT, the headline read. He fished out a few clips for the girl. “Farthing Mansion? Where is it?”

“Just up Blossom Way,” the girl said, pointing with her chin and making the coins in his palm disappear.

“Come on,” he said, interrupting Marasi as she started saying something.

People did make way for him, which was convenient. He could have taken to the sky, but he found the mansion without difficulty, partially because of the people crowded outside and pointing. The symbol was painted in red, exactly like the one he’d known back in the Roughs, but this time it marred the wall of a fine, three-story stone mansion instead of a stagecoach.

“Waxillium, for the love of sanity,” Marasi said, catching up to him. “What has gotten into you?”

He pointed at the symbol.

“I recognize that,” Marasi said. “Why would I recognize that?”

“You read the accounts of my time in the Roughs,” Wax said. “It’s in there—that’s the symbol of Ape Manton, one of my old nemeses.”

“Ape Manton!” Marasi said. “Didn’t he—”

“Yes,” Wax said, remembering the nights of torture. “He hunts Allomancers.”

But why would he be here? Wax had put him away, and not just in some minor village. He’d been locked up in True Madil, biggest town in the Northern Roughs, with a jail like a vise. How in Harmony’s True Name had he gotten all the way down to New Seran?

Robbery wouldn’t be the end of Manton’s activities here. He always had a motive behind the thefts, a goal. *I have to figure out what he took, and why he—*

No.

No, not right now. “Let’s get to the hotel,” Wax said, ripping himself away from the sight of that red symbol.

“Rusts,” Marasi said, hurrying after him. “Could he be involved somehow?”

“With the Set? Not a chance. He hates Allomancers.”

“Enemy of my enemy…”

“Not the Ape,” Wax said. “He wouldn’t take the hand of a Metalborn trying to save him from slipping to his death.”

“So…”

“So he’s not part of this,” Wax said. “We ignore him. I’m here for my uncle.”

Marasi nodded, but seemed disturbed. They passed a Lurcher juggler, dropping balls and tugging them back up into the air—along with the occasional object from among the amused crowd of watchers. A waste of Allomantic abilities. And all these people. Suffocating. He had hoped that in leaving Elendel, he would escape crowded streets. He nearly pulled out his gun and fired a shot to clear them all away.

“Wax…” Marasi said, taking his arm.

“What.”

“*What?* Rusts, your stare could nail a person’s head to the wall right now!”

“I’m fine,” he said, pulling his arm away from her.

“This vendetta against your uncle is—”

“It’s not a vendetta.” Wax picked up his pace, striding through the crowd, mistcoat tassels flaring behind him. “You know what he’s doing.”

“No, and neither do you,” Marasi said.

“He’s breeding Allomancers,” Wax said. “Maybe Feruchemists. I don’t need to know his exact plan to know how bad that is. What if he’s making an army of Thugs and Coinshots? Twinborn. *Compounders.*”

“That might be true,” Marasi admitted. “But you aren’t chasing him because of any of that, are you? He beat you. In the Hundredlives case, Mister Suit *got the best of you*. Now you’re going to win the war where you lost the battle.”

He stopped in place, turning on her. “How petty do you think I am?”

“Considering what I just told you,” she said, “I’d say I consider you precisely *that* petty. It’s not wrong to be angry at Suit, Waxillium. He’s holding your sister. But rusts, please don’t let it cloud your judgment.”

He took a deep breath, then gestured toward the mansion up the street. “You want me to go chasing after the Ape instead?”

“No,” Marasi said, then blushed. “I agree that we need to stay focused on getting back the spike.”

“You’re here for the spike, Marasi,” Wax said. “I’m here to find Suit.” He nodded down the street, toward a discreet hotel sign, barely visible on the front of a building. “You go check us in. I’m going to fetch the others.”

* * *

“With this suite and the others, you’ll basically have the entire top floor to yourselves.” The hotel owner—who insisted upon being called Aunt Gin—beamed as she said it.

Wayne yawned, rubbing his eyes as he poked through the lavish room’s bar. “Great. Lovely. Can I have your hat?”

“My … hat?” The elderly woman looked up at the oversized hat. The sides drooped magnificently, and the thing was *festooned* with flowers. Like, oodles of them. Silk, he figured, but they were really good replicas.

“You have a lady friend?” Aunt Gin asked. “You wish to give her the hat?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I need to wear it next time I’m an old lady.”

“The next time you *what*?” Aunt Gin grew pale, but that was probably on account of the fact that Wax went stomping by, wearing his full rusting mistcoat. That man never could figure out how to blend in.

“Do these windows open?” Wax asked, pointing toward the penthouse suite’s enormous bay windows. He stepped up onto one of the sofas and shoved on the window.

“Well, they used to open,” Aunt Gin said. “But they rattled in the breezes, so we painted them shut and sealed the latches. Never could stand the thought of someone—”

Wax shoved one of them open, breaking off the latch and making a sharp cracking sound as the paint outside was ripped, perhaps some of the wood splintering.

“Lord Ladrian!” Aunt Gin said with a gasp.

“I’ll pay for the repairs,” Wax said, hopping off the couch. “I need that to open in case I have to jump out.”

“Jump—”

“Aha!” Wayne said, pulling open the bar’s bottom cabinet.

“Alcohol?” Marasi asked, walking by.

“Peanuts,” Wayne said, spitting out his gum and then popping a handful of nuts into his mouth. “I ain’t had nothin’ to eat since I swiped that fruit in Steris’s luggage.”

“What are you babbling about?” Steris asked from the couch, where she was writing in her notebook.

“I left you one of my shoes in trade,” Wayne said, then dug in his duster’s pocket, pulling out the other shoe. “Speaking of that, Gin, will you swap me your hat for this one?”

"Your *shoe*?" Aunt Gin asked, turning back toward him, then jumping as Wax forced open another window.

"Sure," Wayne said. "They're both clothes, right?"

"What would I do with a man's shoe?"

"Wear it next time you gotta be a fellow," Wayne said. "You've got the perfect face for it. Good shoulders, too."

"Well, I—"

"Please ignore him," Steris said, rising and walking over. "Here, I've prepared for you a list of possible scenarios that might transpire during our residence here."

"Steris…" Wax said, forcing open the third and final window.

"What?" she demanded. "I will not have the staff unprepared. Their safety is our concern."

"Fire?" Aunt Gin asked, reading the list. "Shoot-outs. Robbery. Hostage situations. *Explosions?*"

"That one is completely unfair," Wax said. "You've been listening to Wayne."

"Things *do* explode around you, mate," Wayne said, munching peanuts. Nice bit of salt on these.

"He's right, unfortunately," Steris said. "I've accounted for seventeen explosions involving you. That's a huge statistical anomaly, even considering your profession."

"You're kidding. Seventeen?"

"Afraid so."

"Huh." He had the decency to look proud of it, at least.

"A pastry shop once blew up while we was in it," Wayne said, leaning in to Aunt Gin. "Dynamite in a cake. Big mess." He held out some peanuts toward her. "How about I throw in these peanuts with the shoe?"

"Those are *my* peanuts! From this very room!"

"But they're worth more now," Wayne said. "On account of my being *real* hungry."

“I told you to ignore him,” Steris said, tapping on the notebook she’d handed Aunt Gin. “Look, you only read the table of contents. The rest of the pages contain explanations of the possible scenarios I’ve outlined, and suggested responses to them. I’ve sorted the list by potential for property damage.”

Wax leaped into the center of the room, then thrust his hand forward. The door quivered.

“What … what is he doing?” Aunt Gin asked.

“Checking to see where the best places in the room are for slamming the door with his mind,” Wayne said. “In case someone bursts in on us.”

“Just read the notebook, all right?” Steris requested in a pleasant tone.

Aunt Gin looked toward her, seeming bewildered. “Are these things … threats?”

“No, of course not!” Steris said. “I only want you to be prepared.”

“She’s thorough,” Wayne said.

“I like to be thorough.”

“Usually that means if you ask her to kill a fly, she’ll burn down the house just to be extra sure it gets done.”

“Wayne,” Steris said, “you’re needlessly making the lady concerned.”

“Flooding from a diverted waterfall,” Aunt Gin said, reading from the book again. “Koloss attack. *Cattle stampede through the lobby?*”

“That one is highly unlikely,” Steris said, “but it never hurts to be prepared!”

“But—”

The door to the adjoining suite slammed open. “Hello, humans,” MeLaan said, stepping into the doorway wearing nothing more than a tight pair of shorts and a cloth wrapped around her chest. “I need to put on something appropriate for tonight. What do you think? Large breasts? Small breasts? *Extra*-large breasts?”

Everybody in the room paused, then turned toward her.

“What?” MeLaan said. “Picking a proper bust size is vital to a lady’s evening preparations!”

Silence.

"That's … kind of an improper question, MeLaan," Steris finally said.

"You're just jealous because you can't take yours off to go for a run," MeLaan said. "Hey, where is that bellboy with my things? I swear, if he drops my bags and cracks any of my skulls, there will be *fury* in this room!" She stalked away.

"Did she say *skulls*?" Aunt Gin said.

The door slammed.

"Aha!" Wax said, lowering his hand. "There it is."

Marasi approached and wrapped her arm around the elderly lady's shoulders, leading her away. "Don't worry. It won't be nearly as bad as they make it seem. Likely nothing will happen to you or your hotel."

"Other than Wax rippin' your windows apart," Wayne noted.

"Other than that," Marasi said, giving him a glare.

"Young lady," Aunt Gin said under her breath, "you need to get away from these people."

"They're fine," Marasi said, reaching the door. "We've just had a long night."

Aunt Gin nodded hesitantly.

"Good," Marasi said. "Now, when you get down below, would you please send someone to the trade bureau for me? Have them collect the names of each and every person who works at the local graveyards."

"Graveyards?"

"It's vitally important," Marasi said, then pushed the woman out and shut the door.

"Graveyards?" MeLaan said, sticking her head into the room. She was now completely bald. "Reminds me. Would you order me something to eat? A nice hunk of aged meat."

"Rotting, you mean," Wax said.

"Nothing like the odor of a nice flank after a day in the sun," MeLaan said, ducking back into her room as a knock came at the other door. "Ah!

My bags. Excellent. What? No, of course there aren't corpses in these. Why would I need bones with the flesh still on them? Thank you. Bye."

Wayne popped the last of the peanuts into his mouth. "I dunno about you all, but *I'm* gonna find a place to snore for a few hours."

"Sleeping arrangements, Waxillium?" Marasi asked.

"You and Steris in the suite across the hall," Wax said, "Wayne and I in here. MeLaan gets her own room. She probably wants to, um…"

"Melt?" Marasi offered.

"… on her own."

"I'm good, really," MeLaan called from the next room. A second later she opened the door again. She wore the same bones and build, but this time she was completely bare-chested.

It wasn't a woman's chest.

"I solved the problem," MeLaan said. "I'll go as a fellow. That will probably be more covert anyway. Just have to choose the right bones."

Wayne cocked his head. She'd sculpted her face too, giving herself masculine features. Steris's eyes were bulging. At least that was worth seeing.

"You're…" Steris said. "You'll become a…"

"A man?" MeLaan asked. "Yeah. It'll look better when I've decided on the right body. Need to settle on a voice, too." She looked around the room. "Um, is this a problem?"

Everyone looked at Wayne for some reason. He thought for a moment, then shrugged. Maybe he should have given his shoes to *her*.

"You don't *mind*?" Steris demanded of him.

"It's still her."

"But she looks like a man!"

"So does the lady what runs this house," Wayne said, "but she has kids, so someone still decided to take her an—"

"It will do, MeLaan," Wax said, resting a hand on Steris's arm. "Assuming you can get into the party."

“Don’t worry about that,” she said, spinning around. “I will get in, and be ready to give you support. But this is your play, Ladrian, not mine. You’re the detective; I’m just around for the punchy-punchy, stabby-stabby.”

She closed the door. Wayne shook his head. *Now that, that’s a situation a man don’t rightly encounter all that often.…* Well, he’d found occasion to be an old lady now and then, so it made sense to him. It was probably good for a woman to be a fellow once in a while, if only to offer some perspective. Easier to piss too. Couldn’t discount that.

“She assumes,” Wax said, “that our detective style isn’t *normally* the punchy-punchy, stabby-stabby type.”

“To be fair,” Wayne said, “it’s usually a more shooty-shooty, whacky-whacky type.”

Marasi rubbed her forehead. “Why are we having this conversation?”

“Because we’re tired,” Wax said. “Get some sleep, everyone. Wayne, you’re going to go with Marasi tonight and dig up some graves.” He took a deep breath. “And I, unfortunately, am going to a party.”

11

Wearing a formal cravat and jacket reminded Wax of the year after he'd left the Village. A year when his uncle had gleefully wrapped him in the packaging of a young nobleman and presented him to the city's elite, feeling he'd won some kind of war when Wax was expelled from Terris society.

Wax had moved back in with his parents, of course. But it had been his uncle who had overseen his education, grooming him specifically as heir to the house. After that time in the Village, Wax's life had grown to be less and less about his immediate family—he'd barely seen his parents during that year, despite living with them.

That was when his uncle's grip had really started to strangle him. Wax tapped his fingers on the armrest of his carriage, remembering those parties. How much were his memories of them colored by his uncle's presence?

The carriage eventually pulled up before a resplendent mansion with stained-glass windows and limelights burning outside. A classical style of lighting, though the interior had little in common with the ancient keeps of lore it was meant to evoke—as he well knew from the floor plans he'd memorized earlier today, while the others were sleeping.

This mansion was more sprawling than imposing, with a multipeaked roof design, like the profile of a mountain range. A line of carriages waited to pull through the coach portico and drop off their occupants.

“You’re nervous,” Steris said, laying her hand on his arm. She wore white lace gloves, and her dress—which she’d fretted over for at least an hour—was one of the filmy and gauzy ones that the most fashionable ladies in Elendel were wearing this year. The skirt was more full and cloudlike than the more traditional gowns Steris usually favored.

He’d been surprised when she’d chosen it. Most of her wardrobe, especially on this trip, was chosen for utility. Why wear this now?

“I’m not nervous,” Wax said, “I’m contemplative.”

“Shall we go over the plan?”

“What plan?” Wax said.

ReLuur, in his ravings, had directed them toward this party of Kelesina Shores, who was a lady of some prestige in New Seran—and who he implied was connected to all this. She was their best lead, though ReLuur’s notebook had also listed five other families he thought were of interest.

The problem was, none of those notes mentioned *why* they were of interest—or what it was ReLuur thought they knew. Why would a group of lords and ladies of the outer cities elite have anything to do with an ancient archaeological relic? True, some noblemen liked to consider themselves “gentlemen adventurers.” But those types mostly sat around smoking cigars and talking. At least that fop Jak actually left his rusting house.

Time wore on, as carriages moved up the drive with all the speed of a line of cows on a hot day. Finally, Wax kicked open his door. “Let’s walk.”

“Oh dear,” Steris said with a sigh. “Again?”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t plan for this.”

“I did. But this line isn’t that long, Lord Waxillium. Don’t you think this time maybe we should wait?”

“I can see the rusting front doors,” Wax said, pointing. “We can walk to them in thirty seconds. Or we can sit here and wait as pompous people waddle out of their seats and fuss with their scarves.”

“I see the night is starting off on the right foot,” Steris said. Wax hopped down, ignoring the footman’s offered hand. He waved the man back, and helped Steris from the vehicle himself. “Go ahead and park,” he called to the coachman. “We’ll call for you when we’re done.” He hesitated. “If you hear gunshots, go back to the hotel. We’ll make our own way.”

The coachman started, but nodded. Wax held his arm out for Steris, and the two strolled along the path into the mansion grounds, passing carriages full of people who seemed to be trying to glare at them without actually looking in their direction.

“I’ve prepared a list for you,” Steris said.

“I’m so surprised.”

“Now, no complaining, Waxillium. It will help. I’ve put the list in this little book,” Steris said, producing a palm-sized notebook, “for ease of reference. Each page contains a conversation opener, indexed to the people it will likely work best upon. The numbers below list ways you could segue the conversation into useful areas and perhaps figure out what our targets are up to, and what their connection is to the Bands of Mourning.”

“I’m not socially incompetent, Steris,” Wax said. “I can make small talk.”

“I know that,” Steris said, “but I’d rather avoid an incident like the Cett party.…”

“Which Cett party?”

“The one where you head-butted someone.”

He cocked his head. “Oh, right. That smarmy little man with the ridiculous mustache.”

“Lord Westweather Cett,” Steris said. “Heir to the house fortune.”

“Right, right…” Wax said. “Stupid Cetts. In my defense, he did call me out. Demanding to duel a Coinshot. I probably saved his life.”

“By breaking his nose.” She held up her hand. “I am not requesting justifications or explanations, Lord Waxillium. I merely thought I’d do what I could to help.”

He grumbled, but took the book, flipping through it by lamplight as they walked across the grounds. At the back of the book were descriptions of the various people likely to be at the party. He’d memorized some descriptions VenDell had sent, but this list was far more extensive.

As usual, Steris had done her research. He smiled, tucking the book into his jacket pocket. Where had she found the time? They continued up the path, though Wax froze as he heard rustling in the shrubbery nearby. He burned steel instantly, noticing some moving points of metal, and his hand went to the pistol under his jacket.

A dirty face peered out and grinned. The eyes were milky white. “Clips for the poor, good sir,” the beggar said, stretching out a hand and exposing long, unkempt fingernails and a ragged shirt.

Wax kept his hand on his weapon, studying the man.

Steris cocked her head. “Are you wearing cologne, beggar?”

Wax nodded as he too smelled it, faintly.

The beggar started, as if surprised, then grinned. “It’s got a good kick to it, my lady.”

“You’ve been *drinking* cologne?” Steris asked. “Well, that can’t be healthy.”

“You should be away from here, beggar,” Wax said, eyeing the cluster of attendants and coachmen closer to the building’s entrance. “These are private grounds.”

“Oh, my lord, I know it, I do.” The beggar laughed. “I own the place, technically. Now, regarding those coins for old Hoid, my *good* lord…” He pushed his hand forward farther, eyes staring sightlessly.

Wax dug in his pocket. “Here.” He tossed the man a banknote. “Get off the grounds and find yourself a proper drink.”

“A generous lord indeed!” the beggar said, dropping to his knees and fishing for the banknote. “But too much! Far too much!”

Wax took Steris’s arm again, walking her toward the imposing front doors.

“My lord!” the beggar screeched. “Your change!”

He saw the blue line moving and reacted immediately, spinning and catching the coin, which had been hurled with exacting accuracy at his head.

So, not blind after all. Wax snorted, pocketing the coin as a passing groundsman saw the beggar and shouted, “Not you again!”

The beggar cackled and disappeared back into the shrubs.

“What was *that* about?” Steris asked.

“Damned if I know,” Wax said. “Shall we?”

They proceeded down the row of waiting carriages, and though the line had sped up during their stroll, they still reached the front doors before they otherwise would have. Wax tipped his head toward a large woman who barely fit through the door of her carriage, then strode up the steps with Steris on his arm.

He presented his card at the door, though they would know to watch for him. This was no simple reception; this was about politics. There would probably be only one official speech—that of the host to the attendees—but everyone knew why they were here. To mingle, share ideas, and likely be invited to donate to one of many causes reflecting outer cities interests.

Wax passed the doorkeeper, who cleared his throat and pointed toward an alcove in the side of the entryway. There, servants were taking hats, coats, and shawls.

“We’ve nothing to check,” Wax said, “thank you.”

The man took Wax’s arm gently as he tried to proceed. “The lady of the house has asked that all attendees be unburdened of items of a vulgar nature, my lord. For the safety of all parties attending.”

Wax blinked, then finally got it. “We have to check weapons? You’re kidding.”

The tall man said nothing.

“I don’t think he’s the joking type,” Steris noted.

“You realize,” Wax said, “that I’m a Coinshot. I could kill a dozen people with your cufflinks.”

“We’d appreciate it if you didn’t,” the doorkeeper said. “If you please, Lord Ladrian, there are to be *no* exceptions. Do we need to call the house Lurcher to make certain you are being honest with us?”

"No," Wax said, pulling his arm free. "But if something goes wrong tonight, you're going to wish we'd never had this conversation." He walked with Steris to the counter where white-gloved servants were taking hats in exchange for tickets. He reluctantly took Vindication from the holster under his arm and set her on the counter.

"Is that all, my lord?" the woman there asked.

He hesitated, then sighed and knelt, pulling his backup gun—a tiny two-shotter—from the holster on his calf. He dropped it onto the counter.

"Might we have a look in the lady's purse?" the servant asked.

Steris submitted.

"You realize," Wax said, "that I'm a deputized constable. If anyone should be armed, it's me."

The servants said nothing, though they seemed embarrassed as they handed back Steris's purse and gave Wax a ticket for his weapons.

"Let's go," he said, pocketing the pasteboard and trying—unsuccessfully—to hide his annoyance. Together they approached the ballroom.

* * *

Wayne liked how banks worked. They had *style*. Many people, they'd keep their money out of sight, hidden under beds and some such. What was the fun of that? But a bank … a bank was a target. Building a place like this, then stuffing it full of cash, was like climbing atop a hill and daring anyone who approached to try to knock you off.

He figured that must be the point. The sport of it. Why else would they put so much valuable stuff together in one place? It was supposed to be a message, proof to the little people that some folks were so rich, they could use their money to build a house for their money and *still* have enough money left to *fill* that house.

Robbing such a place was suicide. So all that potential thieves could do was stand outside and salivate, thinking of the stuff inside. Really, a bank was like a giant sign erected to say "rust off" to everyone who passed by.

Which was magnificent.

He and Marasi stopped on the long flight of steps up to the front, which was set with stained-glass windows and banners, after the classical cantonesque style of architecture. Marasi wanted to come here before the graveyards. Something about the bank records leading them to the right location.

“All right, see,” Wayne said, “I’ve got it figured out. I’m gonna be a rich fellow. Made loads off of the sweat and blood o’ lesser men. Only I won’t say it like that, ’cuz I’ll be in *character*, you see.”

“Is that so?” Marasi said, starting up the steps.

“Yup,” Wayne said, joining her. “Even brought me fancy hat.” He held up a top hat and spun it on his finger.

“That hat belongs to Waxillium.”

“No it don’t,” Wayne said, putting it on. “I gave ’im a rat for it.”

“A … rat?”

“Minus the tail,” Wayne said. “On account of this hat bein’ kinda dusty when I took it. Anyway, I’ll be the rich fellow. You be my younger brother’s daughter.”

“I’m not young enough to be your niece,” Marasi said. “At least not one who…” She trailed off as Wayne scrunched his face up good, emphasizing wrinkles, and brought out his fake mustache. “… Right,” she added. “I’d forgotten about that.”

“Now, my dear,” Wayne said, “while I am distracting the employees of this fine establishment with a depository request, you shall steal into their records room and acquaint yourself with the requisite information. It shouldn’t test your skills, as I shall regale them with descriptions of my wealth and prestige, which should draw the attention of most who are still working at this late hour.”

“Wonderful,” Marasi said.

“As an aside, my dear,” Wayne added, “I am not fond at all of your dalliance with that farmhand upon our estate. He is far beneath you in stature, and your indiscretion will surely besmirch our good name.”

“Oh please.”

“Plus he has warts,” Wayne added as they reached the top of the steps. “And is prone to extreme bouts of flatulence. And—”

“Are you going to talk about this the entire time?”

“Of course! The bank’s employees need to know how I toil with the next generation and its woefully inadequate ability to make decisions *my* generation found simple and obvious.”

“Grand,” Marasi said, pushing through the bank’s broad glass doors.

A banker immediately rushed up to them. “I’m sorry. We’re *very* near closing.”

“My good man!” Wayne began. “I’m certain you can make time for the investment opportunity you will soon find present in—”

“We’re from the Elendel Constabulary,” Marasi interrupted, taking out her engraved credential plate and holding it up. “Captain Marasi Colms. I’d like to look over some of your deposit records. Shouldn’t take but a few minutes, and I’ll be out of your hair.”

Wayne floundered, then gaped at her as the banker—a squat, swarthy man who had a gut like a cannonball and a head to match—took her certification and looked it over. That … that was *cheating*!

“What records do you need?” the banker asked guardedly.

“Do any of these people have accounts with you?” Marasi asked, proffering a paper.

“I suppose I can check…” the banker said. He sighed and walked farther into the building to where a clerk sat going over ledgers. He slid through a door behind the desk, and Wayne could hear him muttering to himself in the room beyond.

“Now I’ve gotta say,” Wayne said, pulling off the top hat, “that was the *worst* example of actin’ I’ve ever seen. Who would believe that the rich uncle has a *constable* for a niece, anyway?”

“There’s no need to lie when the truth will work just as well, Wayne.”

“No need … Of *course* there’s need! Why, what happens when we have to thump some people, then run off with their ledgers? They’re gonna *know* it was us, and Wax’ll have to pay a big heap of compensatory fines.”

“Fortunately, we’re not going to be thumping anyone.”

“But—”

“No thumping.”

Wayne sighed. Fat lot of fun this was going to be.

* * *

“I’ll have you know that we take the privacy of our patrons very seriously,” the banker explained, hand protectively on the ledgers he’d retrieved from the records room. They sat in his office now, and he had a little desk plaque that named him MR. ERIOLA. Neither of the others seemed to grasp why Wayne snickered when he read that.

“I understand,” Marasi said, “but I have a healthy suspicion one of these men is a criminal. Certainly you don’t want to abet their activities.”

“I don’t want to violate their trust in me either,” the banker said. “What makes you so certain these men are criminals? Do you have any proof?”

“The proof,” Marasi said, “will be in the numbers.” She leaned forward. “Do you know how many crimes can be proven by looking at statistics?”

“Considering the question, I’m going to assume it’s a nontrivial number,” the banker said, leaning back in his chair and lacing his hands on his ample belly.

“Er, yes,” Marasi said. “Most crimes can be traced to either passion or wealth. Where wealth is involved, numbers come into play—and where numbers come into play, forensic accounting gives us answers.”

The banker didn’t seem convinced—but then, in Wayne’s estimation, he didn’t seem completely human either. He was at least part dolphin. The man continued plying Marasi with questions, obviously stalling for some reason. That made Wayne uncomfortable. Usually when people stalled like that, it was so their mates could have time to arrive and administer a proper beating.

He bided his time playing with objects on the banker’s desk, trying to build a tower of them, but he kept his eyes on the door. If someone *did* arrive to attack them, he’d have to toss Marasi out the window to get away.

A moment later the door swung open. Wayne grabbed for Marasi, his other hand going for one of his dueling canes, but it was only the clerk from outside. She bustled over to the banker—so Wayne didn't feel a bit guilty admiring her bustle, so to speak—and handed him a half sheet of paper.

"What's that?" Marasi asked as the woman left.

"Telegram," Wayne guessed, relaxing. "Checkin' up on us, are you?"

The banker hesitated, then turned the paper around. It contained a description of Wayne and Marasi, followed by the words, *They are indeed constables under my command. Please afford them every courtesy and liberty in your establishment—though do keep an eye on the short man, and check your till after he leaves.*

"Here, now," Wayne said. "That's right unfair. Those things cost a clip every five words to send, they do. Old Reddi wasted good money libelin' me."

"Technically, it's defamation," Marasi said.

"Yup," Wayne said, "manure, through and through."

"Defa*mation,* Wayne, not … Oh, never mind." She met the eyes of the banker. "Are you satisfied?"

"I suppose," he said, then slid the ledgers over to her.

"Numbers," Marasi said, digging in her purse for a moment. She brought out a small book and tapped it with one finger. "This contains a list of the common wages for workers in the cemetery business, by the job they do." She pulled open the ledgers. "Now, looking at the deposits by our men in question, we can find patterns. Who is putting more money in the bank than their payroll would reasonably account for?"

"Surely this isn't enough to convict a man," the banker said.

"We're not looking to convict," Marasi said, looking through the first ledger. "I just need a little direction.…"

In the minutes that followed, Wayne got his tower to balance with six separate items, *including* the stapler, which left him feeling rather proud. Eventually, Marasi tapped on one of the ledgers.

"Well?" the banker asked. "Did you find your culprit?"

“Yes,” Marasi said, sounding disturbed. “All of them.”

“… All of them.”

“Every rotten one,” Marasi said. “No pun intended.” She took a deep breath, then slapped the ledger closed. “I guess I could have picked one at random, Mister Eriola. But still, it is good to know.”

“To know what?”

“That they’re all crooked,” she said, and started fishing in her purse again. “I should have guessed. Most corpses are buried with *something* valuable, if only the clothing. No use letting that all rot away.”

The banker paled. “They’re selling the *clothing* off the *dead people*.”

“That,” Marasi said, slipping a small bottle of Syles brandy out of her purse and setting it on the table, “and perhaps any jewelry or other personal effects buried with the bodies.”

“Hey,” Wayne said. “I’m right dry in the throat, I am. That would sure hit me well, like a morning piss after a nine-pinter the night afore.”

“That’s horrible!” the banker said.

“Yes,” Marasi said, “but if you think about it, not *too* horrifying. The only crimes being perpetrated here are against the dead, and their legal rights are questionable.”

Wayne fished in his pocket a moment, then brought out a silver letter opener. Where did he get that? He set it on the table and took the drink, downing it in one shot.

“Thank you for your time, Mister Eriola,” Marasi continued, taking the letter opener and sliding it toward the banker. “You’ve been very helpful.”

The banker looked at the letter opener with a start, then checked his desk drawer. “Hey, that’s *mine*,” he said, reaching into the desk and pulling out something that looked like a piece of cord. “Is this … a rat’s tail?”

“Longest I ever seen,” Wayne said. “Quite a prize. Lucky man, you are.”

“How in the world did you…” The banker looked from Wayne to Marasi, then rubbed his head. “Are we finished here?”

“Yes,” Marasi said, standing. “Let’s go, Wayne.”

“Off to make an arrest?” the banker said, dropping the tail into the wastebasket, which was a crime in and of itself. The thing was almost two hands long!

“Arrest?” Marasi asked. “Nonsense, Mister Eriola. We aren’t here to arrest anyone.”

“Then what was the point of all that?”

“Why,” Marasi said, “I had to know whom to employ, of course. Come along, Wayne.”

12

So little had changed since Wax's youth. Oh, the people at this party wore slightly different clothing: formal waistcoats had grown stouter, and hemlines had risen to midcalf while necklines had plunged, with mere bits of gauze draping across the neck and down the shoulders.

The people, though, were the same. They weighed him, calculating his worth, hiding daggers behind ready smiles. He met their condescending nods, and didn't miss his guns as much as he would have thought. Those were not the right weapons for this fight.

"I used to be so nervous at these things," Wax said softly to Steris. "When I was a kid. That was when I still cared about their opinions, I guess. Before I learned how much power over a situation you gain when you decide that you don't care what others think of you."

Steris eyed a couple of passing ladies in their completely laceless gowns. "I'm not certain I agree. How you are perceived *is* important. For example, I'm regretting my choice of gown. I was shooting for fashionable, but fashion is different down here. I'm not in style; I'm avant-garde."

"I like it," Wax said. "It stands out."

“So does a pimple,” Steris said. “Why don’t you get us some drinks, and I’ll take stock of the room and figure out where our targets are?”

Wax nodded in agreement. The grand ballroom was carpeted and adorned with golden chandeliers—though their candleholders glowed with electric lights. The ceiling wasn’t terribly high, but the walls were colorfully decorated with false archways that each held a mural. Classical pieces, like the Ascendant Warrior rising above a flock of ravens—the typical depiction of the Lord Ruler’s wraiths, of whom only Death himself remained.

Though nobody approached him, they also didn’t avoid him. If anything they remained determinedly in his path, refusing to budge—then acted like they hadn’t noticed him as he wove around them. He was from Elendel, their political enemy, and in not moving they made a statement.

Rusts, he hated these games.

The bar covered almost the entire length of the far wall, and was serviced by at least two dozen bartenders, so as to make absolutely certain none of the very important guests had to wait. He ordered wine for Steris and a simple gin and tonic for himself, which got him a raised eyebrow. Apparently that wasn’t fancy enough. Should have ordered straight-up whiskey.

He turned and scanned the room as the bartender prepared the drinks. Soft music by a harpist helped cover the many conversations. It made him uncomfortable to admit that some of the casual discussions in a room like this could do more to affect the lives of the Basin’s people than putting any criminal—no matter how vile—in prison.

Marasi is always talking about things like that, he thought. *How the lawkeeping of the future will be about statistics, not shotguns.* He tried to imagine a world where murders were prevented by careful civic planning, and found himself unable to see it. People would always kill.

Still, sometimes it was hard not to feel like the one chandelier in the room that still required candles.

“Your order, my lord,” the bartender said, setting the drinks down on fancy cloth napkins, each embroidered with the date of the party. Those would be for the attendees to take as keepsakes.

Wax fished a coin from his pocket for a tip and slid it to the bartender. He grabbed his drinks to head back to Steris, but the bartender cleared his throat. The man held up the coin, and it was not a fivespin as Wax had meant to give him. In fact, it was unlike any coin Wax had ever seen.

“Was this a mistake, my lord?” the man asked. “I don’t mean to be ungrateful, but I’d hate to take something that looks like a memento.”

The symbols on that coin … Wax thought, stepping back to the bar. *They’re the same ones as on the walls in the pictures ReLuur took.* He nearly overturned the wineglass of another guest in his haste to grab the coin back. He absently shoved the bartender another tip and held up the coin.

Those *were* the same symbols, or very similar. And it had a face on the back, that of a man looking straight outward, one eye pierced by a spike. The large coin was made of two different metals, an outside ring and an inner one.

The coin certainly didn’t seem old. Was it new, or merely well-preserved? Rust and Ruin … how had this gotten into his pocket?

The beggar tossed it to me, Wax thought. But where had *he* gotten it? Were there more of these in circulation?

Troubled, he struck out to find Steris. As he walked, he passed Lady Kelesina, the party’s hostess and the woman who was his eventual target. The older woman stood resplendent in a gown of black and silver, holding miniature court before a group of people asking after one of her civic projects.

Wax listened in for a moment, but didn’t want to confront the woman yet. He eventually located Steris standing beside a tall, thin table near the corner. There weren’t any chairs in the ballroom. No dancing either, though there was a dance floor raised an inch or two in the center of the chamber.

Wax set the coin on the table and slid it to Steris.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“The coin that the beggar threw at me. Those symbols look similar to the ones in the pictures ReLuur took.”

Steris pursed her lips, then turned the coin over and looked at the other side. “A face with one eye spiked through. Does it mean something?”

“No idea,” Wax said. “I’m more interested in how that beggar got it—and why he threw it at me. It has to be a relic ReLuur found at that temple. Could he have lost it, or traded it to someone, in the city?”

He tapped the table with one finger, certain now that beggar had been something more than he pretended. He was equally certain that if he went hunting now, he’d find that the man had vanished.

Eventually, Wax pocketed the coin. “We have to hope that the answers are in this room somewhere. Assuming Kelesina really is involved.”

“Then it’s time get to work.”

“I passed her back there. Shall we?”

“Not yet. See that couple over there? The man has on a maroon waistcoat.”

Wax followed her nod. The couple she indicated were young, well-dressed, and smug. Great.

“That is Lord Gave Entrone,” Steris said. “Your houses have had some minor business dealings—he’s in textiles—which should give you an opening to speak with him.”

“I’ve heard of him,” Wax said. “I courted a cousin of his once. It went poorly.”

“Well, he’s *also* on the list your mad kandra made in his notebook, so he might know something. He’s young, dynamic, and well-regarded—but not terribly important, so he’ll work nicely as a first try.”

“Right,” Wax said, eyeing Entrone, who had drawn a crowd of several more young women as he told a story that involved lots of gesturing. He took a deep breath. “You want to take the lead?”

“It should be you.”

“You sure? I can’t help feeling I’d be better put to use with Marasi and Wayne, digging in graves—while you are comfortable here. You’re good at these things, Steris. You really are—and *don’t* give me any more of your rhetoric about being ‘boring.’”

Her expression grew distant. “In this case, it’s not that I’m boring, it’s more that … I’m off. I’ve learned to fake being normal, but lists of prepared comments and jokes can only take me so far. People can sense that I’m not being authentic—that I don’t like the things they like or think the way they do. Sometimes it amazes me that people like Wayne, or even those kandra, can be so startlingly human when I feel so alien.”

He wished he could figure out how to keep her from saying things like that. He didn’t know the right words; every time he tried to argue the point, it only seemed to make her withdraw.

Steris held out an arm to him. He took it, and together they crossed the room toward Lord Gave and the small crowd he had drawn. Wax had worried about how to break into the conversation, but as soon as he neared, the people talking to Gave stepped back and made room for him. His reputation and status preceded him, apparently.

“Why, Lord Waxillium!” Gave said with a knowing smile. “I was *delighted* when I heard that you were going to attend our little gathering! I’ve wanted to meet you for years.”

Wax nodded to him, then to his date and a couple he’d been chatting with. Those two didn’t retreat.

“How are you finding New Seran, my lord?” one of the ladies asked him.

“Seems mighty inconvenient to get around,” Wax said. “Nice otherwise, though.”

They laughed at that, as if he’d said something humorous. He frowned. What had he missed?

“I’m afraid,” Gave said, “you won’t find much to interest you here. New Seran is a quiet city.”

“Oh, but what are you saying, Lord Gave!” the other young man said. “Don’t misrepresent our town. The nightlife here is fantastic, Lord Waxillium! And the symphony has been given a citation of excellence by two of your previous governors.”

“Yes,” Gave said, “but there aren’t many shoot-outs.”

The others gave him blank stares.

"I was a lawman," Wax told them, "in the Roughs."

"A…" one of the ladies said. "You oversaw a city's constable precinct?"

"No, he was a *real lawman,*" Gave said. "The 'ride a horse and shoot bandits' type. You should read the accounts—they're all the rage in the Elendel broadsheets."

The three others regarded him with bemused expressions. "How … unique," one of the ladies finally said.

"The accounts are exaggerated," Steris said quickly. "Lord Waxillium has only been *directly* responsible for the deaths of around a hundred people. Unless you include those who died of infection after he shot them—I'm still not sure how to count those."

"It was a difficult life," Wax said, looking toward Gave, who smiled behind his cup of wine, eyes twinkling. For a man like him, Wax and Steris were obviously good sport. "But that is behind me now. Lord Gave, I wanted to thank you for our years of mutually profitable trade."

"Oh, don't bring business into it, Lord Waxillium!" Gave said, with a tip of his wine. "This is a *party*."

The others laughed. Again, Wax had no idea why.

Damn, he thought, looking between them. *I* am *rusty.* He'd complained, dragged his feet, but he hadn't expected to be *this* clumsy.

Focus. Gave knew something about the Bands of Mourning, or at least ReLuur had thought he did.

"Do you have any hobbies, Lord Gave?" Wax asked, earning an eager nod from Steris at the comment.

"Nothing of real note," Gave said.

"He *loves* archaeology!" his date said at the same time though. He gave her a dry look.

"Archaeology!" Wax said. "That's hardly unnotable, Lord Gave."

"He loves relics!" the lady said. "Spends hours at the auction house, snatching up anything he—"

"I like *history,*" Gave interjected. "Artwork from times past inspires me. But you, dear, are making me sound too much like one of those gentlemen adventurers." He sneered at the term. "I'm sure you saw the type up in the Roughs, Lord Waxillium. Men who'd spent their lives in society, but suddenly decided to go off seeking some kind of thrill or another where they don't belong."

Steris stiffened. Wax met the man's gaze levelly. The insult, veiled though it was, was similar to those he'd suffered in Elendel society.

"Better they try something new," Wax said, "as opposed to wasting their lives in the same old activities."

"My Lord Waxillium!" Gave said. "Disappointing one's family is *hardly* original! People have been doing it since the days of the Last Emperor."

Wax made a fist at his side. He was accustomed to insults, but this one still got under his skin. Perhaps it was because he was on edge, or perhaps it was because of his worry about his sister.

He pushed down his anger, Steris squeezing his arm, and tried another tactic. "Is your cousin well?"

"Valette? Most certainly. We are all pleased with her new marriage. I'm sorry your relationship didn't work out, but the man who courted her after you was *dreadful*. When titles are part of a union, it's always unpleasant to see what crawls out from the mists looking for a bone."

He didn't look at Steris as he said it. He didn't need to. That sly smile, so self-satisfied as he sipped his wine.

"You rat," Wax growled. "You rusting, spineless rat." He reached for his gun, which—fortunately—wasn't there.

The other three young nobles looked to him, shocked. Gave grinned in a cocky way before adopting an expression of outrage. "Excuse me," he said, turning his date by the arm and striding away. The others scuttled after.

Wax sighed, lowering his arm, still angry. "He did that *deliberately,*" he muttered. "Didn't he? He wanted an excuse to leave the conversation, so he insulted me. When that didn't work, he flung one at you, knowing I'd overreact."

"Hmmm…" Steris said. "Yes, you have the right of it." Steris nodded. Other people nearby made conversation, but they left an open space around

Wax and Steris.

“I’m sorry,” Wax said. “I let him get to me.”

“That’s why we tried him first,” Steris said. “Good practice. And we *did* learn something. The archaeology comment prodded too close to something he didn’t want to discuss. He turned to veiled insults to distract us.”

Wax took a deep breath, shoving away his annoyance at this entire situation. “What now? Do we try another one?”

“No,” Steris said, thoughtful. “We don’t want our targets to know that we’re approaching them specifically. If you interact with unaffiliated people in between, our pattern will be more difficult to spot.”

“Right,” Wax said, looking through the busy hall as the harpist retreated and a full band, with brass—something you’d never see at a party in Elendel—began setting up instruments in her place.

He and Steris sipped drinks as the music started. Though it was slow enough to encourage dancing with a partner, there was a pep to it Wax hadn’t expected. He found he quite liked it. It seemed to be able to beat out his frustration, turn it to something more excited instead.

“Why don’t you go there next?” Steris said, nodding toward a distinguished older woman with her grey hair in a bun. “That’s Lady Felise Demoux, accompanied by her nephew. You’ve had business dealings with her; she’s exactly the sort of person you’d be expected to seek out. I’ll refill our drinks.”

“Get me a seltzer,” Wax said. “I’ll need my mind clear for this.”

Steris nodded, moving off through the crowd as people made way for dancing in the center of the room. Wax approached Lady Demoux and introduced himself with a card given to her nephew, then requested a dance, which was accepted.

Small talk. He could do small talk. *What is wrong with you, Wax?* he thought at himself as he accompanied Lady Demoux to the dance floor. *You can interrogate a criminal without trouble. Why do you dread simple conversation?*

Part of him wanted to dismiss it as mere laziness. But that was his response to everything he didn't want to do—an excuse. What was it really? Why was he so reluctant?

It's because these are their rules. If I play by them, I accept their games. It felt like he was accepting their collar.

He turned to raise his hand to the side for Lady Demoux to take. However, as he did, a *different* woman slid into place and grasped his hand, towing him into the dancing and away from the perimeter. He was so surprised that he let it happen.

"Excuse me?" Wax said.

"No excuses necessary," the woman said, "I won't take but a moment of your time." She looked to be Terris, judging by her dark skin—though hers was darker than most he'd seen. Her hair was in tight braids, streaked with grey, and her face bore full, luscious lips. She took the lead in the dance, causing him to stumble.

"You realize," she said, "that you are a very rare specimen. Crasher: a Coinshot and a Skimmer."

"Neither are that rare," Wax said, "in terms of Metalborn."

"Ah, but any Twinborn combination is rare indeed. Mistings are one in a thousand; most Ferrings even more unusual, and their bloodlines constrained. To arrive at any specific combination of two is highly improbable. You are one of only three Crashers ever born, Lord Waxillium."

"What, really?"

"I cannot, of course, be one hundred percent certain of that figure. Infant mortality on Scadrial is not as bad as some regions, but still shockingly high. Tell me, have you ever tried increasing your weight while in midair?"

"Who are you?" Wax said, stepping into the dance and seizing back control, twisting her to his right.

"Nobody important," she said.

"Did my uncle send you?"

"I have little interest in your local politics, Lord Waxillium," she replied. "If you would kindly answer my questions, I will let you be."

He turned with her to the music. They danced more quickly than he was accustomed to, though the steps were familiar. The constant intrusion of those brass instruments drove the song, made his steps seem to spring. Why had he mentioned his uncle? Sloppy.

"I've increased my weight while moving," he said slowly. "It doesn't do anything—all things fall at the same speed, regardless of how heavy they are."

"Yes, the uniformity of gravitation," the woman said. "That's not what I'm curious about. What if you're soaring through the air on a Steelpush and you suddenly make yourself heavier. What happens?"

"I slow down—I'm so much heavier that it's harder to Push myself forward."

"Ahh…" the woman said softly. "So it is true."

"What?"

"Conservation of momentum," she said. "Lord Waxillium, when you store weight, are you storing mass, or are you changing the planet's ability to recognize you as something to attract? Is there a difference? Your answer gives me a clue. If you *slow* when you become heavier midflight, then that is not likely due to you having trouble Pushing, but due to the laws of physics."

She stepped back from him in the middle of the dance, releasing his hands and sidestepping another couple, who gave them a glare for interfering with the flow of the dance. She produced a card and handed it toward him. "Please experiment with this further and send me word. Thank you. Now, if I can just figure out why there's no redshift involved in speed bubbles…"

With that she wandered off the floor, leaving him befuddled in the middle of the dancing. Suddenly conscious of how many stares he was drawing, he lifted his chin and sauntered off the dance floor, where he found Lady Demoux and apologized to her profusely for the interruption. She allowed him to have the next dance, which passed without incident, save for Wax having to hear a protracted description of Lady Demoux's prize-winning hounds.

Once done, he tried to find the strange woman with the braids, even going so far as to approach the doorkeeper and ask after her. The card had an address in Elendel, but no name.

The doorman claimed he hadn't admitted anyone by that description, which left Wax even more troubled. His uncle *was* trying to breed Allomancers. A woman asking after the specifics of Allomantic powers couldn't be a coincidence, could it?

He did pass MeLaan. Square-chinned, standing over six feet tall, her masculine body bulged with muscles beneath her tuxedo, and she'd drawn a gaggle of interested young ladies. She winked at Wax as he passed, but he gave her no response.

Steris had a drink waiting for him at the table, where she was flipping through pages of her notebook and mumbling. As Wax neared, he noticed a young man approach and try to engage her in conversation, but she dismissed him with a wiggle of her fingers, not even looking up. The man, deflated, drifted away.

Wax stepped up to the table. "Not interested in dancing?"

"What would be the point?" she said.

"Well, I'm going out and dancing, so maybe you could too."

"You are lord of your house," Steris said absently, still reading. "You have political and economic obligations. Anyone who would want to do the same with me is simply trying to get to you, something for which I have no time."

"Either that," Wax said, "or he thought you were pretty."

Steris looked up from her notes and cocked her head, as if the thought hadn't even occurred to her. "I'm engaged."

"We're new here," Wax said, "largely unknown save to those who pay attention to Elendel politics. The lad probably didn't know who you were."

Steris blinked very pointedly. She actually seemed *troubled* by the idea that someone unknown might find her attractive. Wax smiled, reaching for the cup she'd set out for him. "What is this?"

"Soda water," she said.

He held it up to the light. “It’s *yellow*.”

“All the rage here, apparently,” Steris said. “With lemon flavoring.”

Wax took a drink, then nearly choked.

“What?” Steris asked, alarmed. “Poison?”

“Sugar,” Wax said. “About seven cups of it.”

Steris took a sip, then pulled back. “How odd. It’s like champagne, only … not.”

Wax shook his head. What was wrong with people in this city?

“I’ve decided upon our next target,” Steris said, pointing toward a man across the room leaning against the archway near some tanks of exotic fish. In his thirties, he wore his jacket unbuttoned with a kind of purposeful sloppiness. Occasionally, someone else would approach and talk to him for a short time, then move back out into the crowd.

“They’re reporting to him?” Wax asked.

“Devlin Airs,” Steris said with a nod. “Informant. You’ll find his sort at any party. He’s either one of the least important people in the room or one of the most important, depending upon the secrets you’re interested in discovering. He was also on ReLuur’s list.”

Wax studied the man for a time, and when he looked back toward Steris, half of his fizzy yellow drink was gone. She looked innocently in the other direction.

“Probably best,” she said, “if you approach him alone. His type doesn’t like an audience.”

“All right,” Wax said, taking a deep breath.

“You can do this, Lord Waxillium.”

He nodded.

“I mean it,” Steris said, resting her hand on his. “Lord Waxillium, this is exactly what you’ve been doing for the last twenty years, in the Roughs.”

“I could shoot people there, Steris.”

“Could you really? Is that how you solved things? You couldn’t get answers, so you shot somebody?”

“Well, I’d usually just punch them.”

She gave him a raised eyebrow.

"To be honest, no, I didn't have to shoot—or punch—all that often. But the rules *were* different. Hell, I could *make* the rules, if I needed to."

"Same goes here," Steris said. "These people know things that you need to know. You need to either trick them or trade with them. As you've always done."

"Perhaps you're right."

"Thank you. Besides, who knows? Maybe he'll pull a knife on you, and you'll get an excuse to punch him anyway."

"Don't get my hopes up," he said, then gave her a nod, and walked across the room.

* * *

The gates to the Seran New District Cemetery were topped with a crouching statue of the Survivor, scarred arms spread wide and gripping the metalwork arch on either side. Marasi felt dwarfed by the statue's looming intensity—brass cloak tassels spreading out in a radial flare behind him, his metallic face glaring down at those who entered. A spear through his back pierced the front of his chest, the polished tip emerging to hang a foot below the center of the arch.

When she and Wayne passed beneath it, Marasi felt as if it should drip blood upon her. She shivered, but didn't slow her step. She refused to be intimidated by the Survivor's glare. She'd been raised Survivorist, so the gruesome imagery associated with the religion was familiar to her.

It was just that every time she saw a depiction of the Survivor, his posture seemed so demanding. It was like he *wanted* people to recognize the contradiction in his religion. He commanded that people survive, yet the death imagery associated with him was a cruel reminder that they'd eventually fail in that task. Survivorism therefore was not about winning, but about lasting as long as you could before you lost.

The Survivor himself, of course, broke the rules. He always had. Doctrine explained he was not dead, but surviving—and planning to return in their time of greatest need. But if the end of the world hadn’t been enough to get him to return in his glory, then what could *possibly* do so?

They wound through the graveyard, seeking the caretaker’s building. Evening had fallen, and the mists had decided to come out tonight. She tried not to take that as any kind of sign, but it *did* make the place look extra creepy. Gravestones and statues were shadowed in the churning mists. Some nights, she saw the mists as playful. Tonight their unpredictable motions seemed more a crowd of shifting spirits, watching her and Wayne, angered at their intrusion.

Wayne started whistling. That sent another shiver up Marasi’s spine. Fortunately, the gravekeeper’s building was now only a short distance up the path—she could see its lights creating a bubble of yellow in the mists.

She stuck close to Wayne, *not* because she felt more comfortable having him beside her. “Our target is a man named Dechamp,” she said. “Should be the night gravekeeper, and one of those whose ledger entries show regular upticks in income. He’s grave robbing for sure. In fact, this cemetery showed the highest frequency of that, *and* the ledgers listed it as the place the city pays to take care of unidentified bodies. I’m reasonably certain the kandra’s remains ended up here; we just need to find this man and get him to dig for us.”

Wayne nodded.

“This won’t be like with the banker,” Marasi said. “Who was reluctant, but ultimately helpful.”

“Really?” Wayne said. “Because I thought he was kind of a tit.…”

“Focus, Wayne. We’ll have to use the full weight of the law here, to push this man. I suspect we’ll have to offer clemency to get him to help us.”

“Wait, wait,” Wayne said, stopping on the path, tendrils of mist curling around his brow, “you’re gonna flash your goods at him *too*?”

“I really wish you wouldn’t phrase it that way.”

“Now, listen,” Wayne said softly, “you were right ’bout the banker. You did damn good work in there, Marasi, and I’m not too proud to admit it. But authority works different out here in the world of regular men. You bring out your credentials with this fellow, and I guarantee he’s gonna react like a rabbit. Find the nearest hole, hunker down, not say a word.”

“Good interrogation techniques—”

“Ain’t worth beans if you’re in a hurry,” Wayne said, “which we are. I’m puttin’ my foot down.” He hesitated. “’Sides, I already lifted your credentials.”

“You…” Marasi started, then rummaged through her purse and discovered that the small, engraved plate that held her constable’s credentials was gone, replaced with an empty bottle of Syles brandy. “Oh please. This isn’t worth *nearly* the same as those credentials.”

“I know I gave you a good deal,” Wayne said. “’Cuz yours is only a bit of useless metal—which is about what it’d be worth here, in this cemetery.”

“You *will* give the credentials back after we’re done.”

“Sure. If you fill that bottle in trade.”

“But you said—”

“Convenience fee,” Wayne said, then looked up the path toward the gravekeeper’s building. He took his top hat off and stomped on it.

Marasi stepped back, hand to her breast, as Wayne ground the hat beneath his heel, then brought it up and twisted it the other way. Finally, after inspecting it critically, he pulled a knife off his metalbelt and cut a hole in the hat’s side. He tossed aside his duster and cut off one of the straps of his suspenders.

When the top hat went back on his head, he looked shockingly like a vagrant. Of course, he was always one step from *that*, but it was still surprising how much of a difference two little changes could make. He spun the knife in his hand and inspected Marasi with a critical eye. The sun had set completely, but with the light of the city diffusing through the mists, it could actually be brighter on a night like this than on one without any mist.

“What?” Marasi said, uncomfortable.

“You look too fancy,” Wayne said.

Marasi glanced down at herself. She wore a simple, sky-blue day dress, hem at midcalf, laced up the sleeves and neck. “This is pretty ordinary,

Wayne.”

“Not for what we’ll be doin’.”

“I can be your employer or something.”

“Men like this don’t open up none if there’s someone respectable about.” He spun the knife in his hand, then reached for her chest.

“Wayne!” she said.

“Don’t be so stiff. You want this done right, right?”

She sighed. “Don’t get too frisky.”

“Sooner get frisky with a lion, Mara. That I would.”

He cut the opaque lace window out of her bodice, leaving her with a plunging neckline. Her sleeves went next, shortened by a good foot to above the elbow. He took the lace there and tied it like a ribbon around her dress right beneath her breasts, then pulled the laces on the back of the dress more tightly. That lifted and thrust her upper chest outward in a decidedly scandalous way.

From there, he made a few choice slits on the skirt before rubbing dirt on the bottom parts. He stepped back, tapping his cheek thoughtfully, and nodded.

Marasi looked down, inspecting his handiwork, and was actually impressed. Beyond enhancing the bust, he’d cut along seams, pulling out threads, and the effect wasn’t so much *ruined* as *used*.

“Everyone looks at the chest first,” Wayne said, “even women, which is kinda strange, but that’s the way it is. Like this, nobody will care that the dirt looks too fresh and the rest of the dress ain’t aged properly.”

“Wayne, I’m shocked,” she said. “You’re an *excellent* seamstress.”

“Clothes is fun to play with. Ain’t no reason that can’t be manly.” His eyes lingered on her chest.

“Wayne.”

“Sorry, sorry. Just gettin’ into character, you know.” He waved for her to follow, and they headed up the path. As they did, Marasi realized something.

She wasn’t blushing.

Well, that’s a first, she thought, growing strangely confident.

“Try not to open your mouth much,” Wayne advised as they approached the hut. “On account of you normally soundin’ way too smart.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

He snapped a branch off a tree they passed, spun it around his finger, then held it down before himself like a gnarled cane. Together they approached the glowing building: a small, thatched structure that had a few weathered mistwraith statues sticking up from its mossy yard. The statues—made in the form of skeletons with skin pulled tight across the skulls—were traditionally thought to ward away the real things, as mistwraiths could be very territorial. Marasi suspected the creatures could tell the difference between real and stone members of their species—but of course, scientists claimed that the mistwraiths hadn’t even survived the Catacendre in the first place. So the question was probably moot.

A greasy little man with a blond ponytail whistled to himself beside the hut, sharpening his shovel with a whetstone. *Who sharpens a shovel?* Marasi thought as Wayne presented himself, chest thrust out, improvised cane before him as if he were some grand attendee at a ball.

“And are you,” Wayne said, “bein’ the one called Dezchamp?”

“Dechamp,” the man said, looking up lazily. “Now, now. Did I leave that gate open again? I am supposed to be closin’ the thing each night. I’ll have to be askin’ you to leave this premises, sir.”

“I’ll make my way out, then,” Wayne said, pointing with his cane-stick, yet not moving. “But afore I go, I would like to make you aware of a special business proposition regardin’ you and me.”

Wayne had exaggerated his accent to the point that Marasi had to pay strict attention to make out what he was saying. Beyond that, there was a more staccato sense to it. More stressed syllables, more of a rhythm to the sentences. It was, she realized, very similar to the accent the gravekeeper was using.

“I’m a honest man, I am,” Dechamp said, drawing his whetstone along his shovel. “I don’t have no business I needs to discuss, particularly not at a time of night like this one here.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of your honesty,” Wayne said, rolling back on his heels, hands on his cane before him. “Heard it spoken of from one street to the next. Everyone’s talkin’ ’bout your honesty, Dechamp. It’s a right *keen* topic of interest.”

“If everyone’s sayin’ so much,” Dechamp replied, “then you’ll know I already got plenty of people with whom to share my honesty. I’m … gainfully contracted.”

“That don’t matter none for our business.”

“I do think it might.”

“See, it won’t,” Wayne said, “on account of my needin’ only one special little item, that nobody else would find of interest.”

Dechamp looked Wayne up and down. Then he eyed Marasi, and his eyes lingered as Wayne had said they would. Finally Dechamp smiled and stood, calling into the hut. “Boy? Boy!”

A child scrambled out into the mists, bleary-eyed and wearing a dirty smock and trousers. “Sir?”

“Go and kindly do a round of the yard,” Dechamp said. “Make sure we ain’t disturbed.”

The boy grew wide-eyed, then nodded and scampered off into the mists. Dechamp rested his shovel on his shoulder, pocketing the whetstone. “Now, what can I be callin’ you, good sir?”

“Mister Coins will do,” Wayne said. “And I’ll be callin’ you Mister Smart Man, for the decision you just made right here and now.”

He was changing his accent. It was subtle, but Marasi could tell he’d shifted it faintly.

“Nothing is set as of yet,” Dechamp said. “I just like to give that boy some exercise now and then. Keeps his health.”

“Of course,” Wayne said. “And I understand completely that nothing has been promised. But I tell you, this thing I want, ain’t *nobody* else goin’ to give you a clip for it.”

“If that’s so, then why are you so keen for it?”

“Sentimental value,” Wayne said. “It belonged to a friend, and it was really hard for him to part with it.”

Marasi snorted in surprise at that one, drawing Dechamp’s attention.

“Are you the friend?”

“I don’t speak skaa,” she said in the ancient Terris language. *“Could you perhaps talk in Terris, please?”*

Wayne winked at her. “No use, Dechamp. I can’t get her to speak proper, no matter how much I try. But she’s fine to look at, ain’t she?”

He nodded slowly. “Iffen this item be under my watchful care, where might it be found?”

“There was a right tragic incident in town a few weeks back,” Wayne said. “Explosives. People dead. I hear they brought the pieces to you.”

“Bilmy runs the day shift,” Dechamp said. “He brought ’em in. The ones what weren’t claimed, the city put in a nice little grave. They was mostly beggars and whores.”

“And right undeservin’ of death,” Wayne said, taking off his hat and putting it over his breast. “Let’s go see them.”

“You want to go *tonight*?”

“Iffen it ain’t too much a sweat.”

“Not much sweat, Mister Coins,” Dechamp said, “but your name had better match your intentions.”

Wayne promptly got out a few banknotes and waved them. Dechamp snatched them, sniffed them for some reason, then shoved them in his pocket. “Well, those ain’t coins, but they’ll do. Come on, then.”

He took out an oil lantern, then led them into the mists.

“You changed your accent,” Marasi whispered to Wayne as they followed a short distance behind.

“Aged it back a tad,” Wayne explained softly. “Used the accent of a generation past.”

“There’s a difference?”

He looked shocked. “Of *course* there is, woman. Made me sound older, like his parents. More authority.” He shook his head, as if he couldn’t believe she'd even asked.

Dechamp's lantern reflected off the mists as they walked, and that actually made it harder to see in the night, but he'd probably need it when digging. It did little to dispel the eeriness of gravestones broken by the occasional twisted mistwraith image. She understood, logically, why the tradition would have grown up. If there was one place you wanted to keep scavengers away from, it would be the graveyard. Except that the place had its own set of human scavengers, so the statues weren't working.

"Now," Dechamp said, and Wayne caught up to listen, "I'll have you know that I *am* an honest man."

"Of course," Wayne said.

"But I'm also a thrifty man."

"Ain't we all," Wayne said. "I never buys the fancy beer, even when it's last call and the bartender halves it to empty the barrel."

"You're a man after my own heart, then," Dechamp said. "Thrifty. What's the good of lettin' things rot and waste away, I says. The Survivor, he didn't waste nothing useful."

"Except noblemen," Wayne said. "Wasted a fair number o' them."

"Wasn't a waste," Dechamp said, chuckling. "That there was *weapons* testing. Gotta make sure your knives is workin'."

"Indeed," Wayne said. "Why, sometimes the sharp ends on mine need *lotsa* testin'. To make sure they don't break down in the middle of a good killin'."

They shared a laugh, and Marasi shook her head. Wayne was in his element—he could talk about stabbing rich people all day long. Never mind that he himself was wealthier, now, than most of Elendel.

She didn't much care to listen to them as they continued to laugh and joke, but unfortunately she also didn't want to get too far away in this darkness. Yes, the mists were supposed to belong to the Survivor, but *rusts*, every second tombstone looked like a figure stumbling toward her in the night.

Eventually the gravekeeper led them to a freshly filled grave tucked away behind a few larger mausoleums. It was unmarked save for the sign of the spear, carved in stone and set into the dirt. Nearby, a few other new graves—these open—awaited corpses.

“You might want to grab a seat,” Dechamp said, hefting his shovel. “This’ll go fast, since the grave is upturned, but not *that* fast. And you might tell the lady to watch the other way. There’s no tellin’ what bits I might toss up.”

“Grab a seat…” Wayne said, looking around at the field of tombstones. “Where, my good man?”

“Anywhere,” Dechamp said, starting to dig. “They don’t care none. That’s the motto of the gravekeeper, you know. Just remember, they don’t care none.…”

And he set to it.

13

I have to accept their rules, Wax thought, crossing the room to the informant. *They're different, no matter what Steris says. But I* do *know them.*

He'd decided to stay in the Basin and do what he could here. He'd seen the dangers on the streets of Elendel, and had worked to fight them. But those were a lesser wound—it was like patching the cut while the rot festered up the arm.

Chasing down the Set's lesser minions … they probably *wanted* him doing those things. If he was going to protect the people, he was going to have to gun for more important targets. That meant keeping his temper, and it meant dancing and playing nice. It meant doing all the things his parents, and even his uncle, had tried to teach him.

Wax stopped near the alcove the informant, Devlin, occupied. The man was watching the nearby fish tank, which stood beneath a depiction of Tindwyl, Mother of Terris, perched on the walls during her last stand against the darkness. In the tank, tiny octopuses moved across the glass.

After a moment's waiting, the informant nodded toward him. Wax approached and rested his arm against the glass of the tank beside Devlin, a short, handsome man with a hint of hair on his upper lip and chin.

"I expected you to be arrogant," Devlin noted.

"What makes you think that I'm not?"

"You waited," Devlin said.

"An arrogant man can still be polite," Wax said.

Devlin smiled. "I suppose he can be, Lord Waxillium." One of the little octopuses seized a passing fish in its tentacles and dropped from the side of the tank, holding the squirming fish and pulling it up toward its beak.

"They don't feed them," Devlin noted, "for a week or so before a party. They like the show they provide."

"Brutal," Wax said.

"Lady Kelesina imagines herself the predator," he said, "and we all her fish, invited in to swim and perhaps be consumed." Devlin smiled. "Of course, she doesn't see that she's in a cage as well."

"You know something about that cage?" Wax asked.

"It's the cage we're all in, Lord Waxillium! This Basin that Harmony created for us. So perfect, so *lush*. Nobody leaves."

"I did."

"To the Roughs," Devlin said, dismissive. "What's *beyond* them, Waxillium? Beyond the deserts? Across the seas? Nobody cares."

"I've heard it asked before."

"And has anyone put up the money to find the answers?"

Wax shook his head.

"People can ask questions," Devlin said, "but where there is no money, there are no answers."

Wax found himself chuckling, to which Devlin responded with a modest nod. He had developed a subtle way of explaining that he needed to be paid to give information. Oddly, despite the immediate—and somewhat crass—demand, Wax found himself more comfortable here than he'd been with Lord Gave.

Wax fished in his pocket and held out the strange coin. "Money," he said. "I have an interest in money."

Devlin took it, then cocked an eyebrow.

"If someone could tell me how this could be spent," Wax noted, "I would be enriched. Really, we all would be."

Devlin turned it over in his fingers. "Though I've never seen the exact image on this one, coins like these have been moving with some regularity through black-market antiquities auctions. I've been baffled as to why. There is no reason to keep them secret, and it would not be illegal to sell them in the open." He flipped the coin back to Wax.

He caught it with surprise.

"You didn't expect me to answer so frankly," Devlin said. "Why do people so often ask questions when they're not expecting answers?"

"Do you know anything else?" Wax asked.

"Gave bought a few," Devlin said, "then immediately stopped, and the pieces he purchased are no longer on display in his home."

Wax nodded thoughtfully and dug into his pocket for some money to offer the informant.

"Not here," Devlin said, rolling his eyes. "One hundred. Send a note of transfer to your bank and have them move it to my account."

"You'd trust me?" Wax asked.

"Lord Waxillium, it's my *job* to know whom to trust."

"It will be done, then. Assuming you have a little more for me."

"Whatever is being covered up," Devlin said, looking back toward the fish tank, "a good quarter of the nobility in the city is embroiled in it. First I was curious; now I'm terrified. It involves a massive building project to the northeast of here."

"What kind of building project?" Wax asked.

"No way of knowing," Devlin said. "Some farmers have seen it. Claimed Allomancers were involved. News died before it got here. Quashed. Smothered. Everything's been strange in New Seran lately. A murderer from the Roughs showing up, attacking the homes of rich Metalborn, then *you* come to a party…"

"This project to the northeast," Wax said. "Allomancers?"

"I don't have anything more on it," Devlin said, then tapped the fish tank, trying to frighten one of the little octopuses.

"What about the explosion a few weeks back?" Wax asked. "The one in the city?"

"An attack by this murderer from the Roughs, they say."

"Do you believe them?"

"It didn't kill any Metalborn," Devlin said.

None that you know of, Wax thought. Where did Hemalurgy fit into all of this?

Devlin stood and nodded to Wax, extending a hand as if in farewell.

"That's it?" Wax asked.

"Yes."

"Steep price for so little," Wax said, taking the hand.

Devlin leaned in, speaking softly, "Then let me give you a bit more. What you're involved in is dangerous, more than you can imagine. Get out. That's what I'm doing."

"I can't," Wax said as Devlin pulled back.

"I know you, lawman," Devlin said. "And I can tell you, the group you chase, you don't need to worry about them. They won't be a danger for decades, perhaps centuries. You're ignoring the bigger threat."

"Which is?" Wax asked.

"The rest of the people in this room," Devlin said, "the ones not involved in your little conspiracy—the ones who care only about how their cities are being treated."

"Pardon," Wax said, "but they don't seem like nearly the same level of danger to me."

"Then you aren't paying attention," Devlin said. "Personally, I'm curious to find out how many lives the Basin's first civil war claims. Good day, Lord Ladrian." He walked away, snapping his fingers as he passed a few people. One of them scuttled off to follow him.

Wax found himself growling softly. First that woman during the dancing, now this fellow. Wax felt like he was being jerked around on the end of someone's string. What had he even found out? Confirmation that artifacts were being sold? So someone else had found the place that ReLuur had evanotyped?

A building project, Wax thought. *Allomancers*.

Civil war.

Feeling cold, Wax moved back through the crowd. He rounded a group of people, noting that Steris was gone from their table—though she'd finished his cup of sweetened soda water before leaving. He turned and started through the crowd, looking for her.

That, by chance, brought him unexpectedly face-to-face with a statuesque woman with her hair in a bun and a ring on each finger. "Why, Lord Waxillium," Kelesina said, waving for her companions to withdraw, leaving her alone with Wax. "I was hoping to get a chance to speak with you."

He felt an immediate spike of panic—which he shot in the head and dumped in a lake. He would *not* be intimidated by one of Suit's lackies, no matter how wealthy or influential. "Lady Shores," he said, taking her hand and shaking it rather than kissing it. He might not be in the Roughs, but he didn't intend to take his eyes off his enemy.

"I hope you've been enjoying the party," she said. "The main address is about a half hour away; you might find it of note. We've invited the mayor of Bilming himself to speak. I'll be certain to get you a transcript to bring back to your peasant governor, so that you needn't worry about memorizing the details."

"That's very courteous of you."

"I—" she began.

Rusts, he was *tired* of letting someone else steer his conversation tonight.

"Have you seen Lord Gave?" Wax interrupted. "I insulted him by accident earlier. I wish to make amends."

"Gave?" Kelesina said. "Don't mind him, Waxillium. He's hardly worth the bother."

"Still," Wax said. "I feel like I'm wearing blocks of concrete on my feet and trying to dance! Every step I take, I smash *somebody's* toes. Rusts, I'd hoped that people down here wouldn't be as touchy as they are in Elendel."

She smiled. The words seemed to put her at ease, as if she were getting from him exactly what she expected.

Use that, Wax told himself. But how? This woman had decades' worth of experience moving in social circles. Steris could opine all she wanted about his virtues, but he'd spent years doing target practice instead of attending parties. How could he expect to match these people at their own game?

"I'm sorry to see you didn't bring your associate," Kelesina said.

"Wayne?" Wax asked, genuinely incredulous.

"Yes. I've had letters regarding him from friends in Elendel. He seems so colorful!"

"That's one way to put it," Wax said. "Pardon, Lady Kelesina, but I'd sooner bring my *horse* to a party. It's better behaved."

She laughed. "You are a charmer, Lord Waxillium."

This woman was guilty as sin, and he knew it. He could feel it. He did the next part by instinct. He pulled the coin from his pocket and held it up.

"Maybe you can answer something for me," he said, and realized he'd started to let a Roughs accent slip into his voice. *Thanks for that, Wayne*. "I was given this outside, by mistake I think. I asked some folks in here about it, and some of them got so pale in the face, I'd have thought they'd been shot."

Kelesina froze.

"Now personally," Wax said, flipping it over, "I think it has to do with those rumors of what's happenin' out northeast. Big dig in the ground, I'll bet? Well, I figure this must be from that. Relic from the old days. Mighty interesting, eh?"

"Don't be taken in by those rumors, Lord Waxillium," she said. "After stories circulated, people began coining things like those in the city to sell to the gullible."

"Is that so?" Wax said, trying to sound disappointed. "That's a shame. It sounded really interesting to me." He pocketed the coin as the band started another song. "Care for a dance?"

“Actually,” she said, “I promised the next one already. Can I find you later, Lord Waxillium?”

“Sure, sure,” he said, then gave her a nod as she withdrew. He stepped back to his table, watching her move pointedly through the crowd with frightened motions.

“Was that Lady *Kelesina*?” Steris said, joining him, holding another cup of the sweetened yellow drink.

“Yup,” Wax said.

“I wasn’t planning to talk to her until after the speech,” Steris said, huffing. “You’ve thrown off my entire timeline.”

“Sorry.”

“It will have to do. What did you discover from her?”

“Nothing,” Wax said, still watching Lady Kelesina as she met with some men in suits nearby. She kept her face calm, but the curt way she motioned … yes, she sure was agitated. “I told her what I’d discovered.”

“You *what*?”

“I tipped her off that I was on to them,” Wax said, “though I tried to act stupid. I don’t know if she bought that part. Wayne’s far better than I am at it. He’s a natural, you see.”

“You’ve ruined it then?”

“Maybe,” Wax said. “But then, if this were the Roughs and I were confronting a criminal—but had no evidence—this is what I’d do. Let it slip that I was suspicious of them, then watch where they go.”

Lady Kelesina stalked from the hall, leaving one of the other men to give apologies. Wax could almost hear them. *The lady has a matter of some urgency to take care of at the moment. She will return shortly.*

Steris followed his gaze.

“Ten notes says she’s gone to contact Suit,” Wax said, “and let him know that I’m on to them.”

“Ah,” Steris said.

He nodded. “I figured I couldn’t outtalk her, no matter how hard I tried. But she’s not used to being chased by the law. She will make simple mistakes, ones that even a rookie stagecoach robber would never make.”

“We’ll need to follow her somehow.”

“That would be the plan,” Wax said, drumming his fingers on the table. “I may have to start a fight and get thrown out.”

“Lord Waxillium!” Steris said, then started fishing in her purse.

“I’m sorry. I’m having trouble thinking of something else.” It was a weak plan though. Getting thrown out would likely alert Kelesina. “We need a distraction, an excuse to leave. Something believable, but not *too* disconcerting … What is that?”

Steris had removed a small vial of something from her purse. “Syrup of ipecac and saltroot,” she said. “To induce vomiting.”

He blinked in shock. “But why…”

“I had assumed they might try to poison us,” Steris said. “Though I considered it only a small possibility, it’s best to be prepared.” She laughed uncomfortably.

Then she downed the whole thing.

Wax reached for her arm, but too late. He watched in horror as she stoppered the empty vial and tucked it into her purse. “You might want to get out of the splash radius, so to speak.”

“But … Steris!” he said. “You’ll end up humiliating yourself.”

She closed her eyes. “Dear Lord Waxillium. Earlier, you spoke of the power of not caring about what others thought of you. Do you remember?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you see,” she said, opening her eyes and smiling, “I’m trying to practice that skill.”

She proceeded to vomit all over the table.

* * *

The digging continued, and Marasi passed the time reading inscriptions on gravestones. Wayne, for his part, had settled down on a grave with his back to the stone, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. As she passed to check on the progress, she found him rummaging in his pocket. A moment later, he pulled a *sandwich* out and started eating. When he saw Marasi staring at him, he held it toward her, wagging it to see if she wanted a bite.

Feeling sick, she turned away from him and sought out more grave inscriptions. This was obviously the poorer section of the yard; plots were close together, and the markers were small and simple. The mist wove between them, curling around her as she knelt beside a stone, wiped off the moss, and read the memorial left for the child buried here. *Eliza Marin. 308–310. Ascend and be free.*

The steady sound of the gravedigger's shovel accompanied her as she moved between the graves. Soon she was too far from the light to make out the inscriptions. She sighed, turning, and found someone standing in the mists nearby.

She practically jumped out of her shoes, but the shifting mists—and the figure's too-steady posture—soon revealed this to be a statue. Marasi approached, frowning. Who had paid for a statue to be placed in the paupers' section of the graveyard? It was old, having sunken a foot or so on the right side as the ground shifted, tipping the statue askew. It was also masterly, an extraordinary figure cut of gorgeous black marble standing some eight feet tall and resplendent in a sweeping mistcloak.

Marasi rounded it, and was not surprised to find a feminine figure with short hair and a petite, heart-shaped face. The Ascendant Warrior was here, settled among the graves of the impoverished and the forgotten. Unlike Kelsier's statue, which had loomed over those who passed beneath his gaze, this one seemed about to take flight, one leg raised, eyes toward the sky.

"For years, I wanted to be you," Marasi whispered. "Every girl does, I suppose. Who wouldn't, after hearing the stories?" She'd even gone so far as to join the ladies' target club because she figured if she couldn't Push bits of metal around, a gun was the closest she could get.

"Were you ever insecure?" Marasi asked. "Or did you always know what to do? Did you get jealous? Frightened? Angry?"

If Vin had been an ordinary person at any point, the stories and songs had forgotten. They proclaimed her the Ascendant Warrior, the woman who had slain the Lord Ruler. A Mistborn and a legend who had carried the world itself upon her arms while Harmony prepared for divinity. She'd been able to kill with a glare, tease out secrets nobody else knew, and fight off armies of enraged koloss all on her own.

Extraordinary in every way. It was probably a good thing, or the world wouldn't have survived the War of Ash. But rusts … she left a hell of a reputation for the rest of them to try to live up to.

Marasi turned from the statue and crossed the springy ground back to Wayne and Dechamp. As she approached, the gravedigger climbed out and stuck his shovel into the earth, digging a flask from his pack and taking a protracted swig.

Marasi peeked into the grave. He had made good time—the earth had been dug out of the hole four feet deep.

"Wanna share that with a fellow?" Wayne asked Dechamp, standing.

Dechamp shook his head, screwing the lid back on his flask. "My gramps always said, never share your booze with a man who ain't shared his with you."

"But that way, nobody'd share their booze with anybody!"

"No," Dechamp said. "It just means I get twice as much." He rested his hand on his shovel, looking into the grave. Without the steady rhythm of his work, the graveyard was silent.

They had to be close to the bodies now. The next part would be unpleasant—sorting through the corpses for one that was in pieces, then checking that to see if it contained a spike. Her stomach churned at the thought. Wayne took another bite of his sandwich, hesitated, and cocked his head.

Then he grabbed Marasi under the arm and heaved, flipping her into the grave. The impact knocked the breath out of her.

Gunfire sounded above a moment later.

14

Marasi gasped as Wayne slid into the shallow grave, flopping down square on top of her. It knocked the wind out of her *again*.

Wayne grunted, and the gunshots stopped a moment later. Still trying to recover, Marasi stared up at the black sky and swirling mist. It took her a moment to realize that the mist was frozen in place.

“Speed bubble?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Wayne said, then groaned, twisting to the side and putting his back to the earthen wall so he wasn’t lying directly on her. His shoulder glistened with something wet.

“You’ve been hit.”

“Three times,” Wayne said, then winced as he turned his leg. “No, four.” He sighed, then took a bite of his sandwich.

“So…”

“Give me a sec,” he said.

She twisted in the grave and peeked up over the earthen lip. Nearby, Dechamp fell slowly—as if through molasses—toward the ground, blood spraying from several gunshot wounds, droplets hanging in the air. A vanishing muzzle flash from the darkness revealed the origin of the gunfire: a group of figures on the path, shadowed and nearly invisible. Bullets zipped through the mist, leaving trails.

“How’d you know?” she asked.

“They made the crickets stop,” Wayne said. “Dechamp musta sold us out. I’d bet Wax’s hat that he sent that boy to fetch these fellows.”

“The Set was here first,” Marasi said, her stomach sinking.

“Yeah.” Wayne poked at one of the holes in his shirt, wiggling it around to check that the wound had healed. With his other hand, he stuffed the last bite of sandwich into his mouth, then joined her in peeking up over the lip of the grave. Above, a lethargically moving bullet hit the invisible edge of Wayne’s speed bubble. In an eyeblink, it zipped across the air—barely a foot over Marasi’s head—before hitting the other side, where it slowed down again.

She cringed belatedly. Anytime something entered a speed bubble, it was refracted, changing trajectory. While it was unlikely one would get bounced so radically that it would point downward toward them, it *was* possible. Beyond that, Wayne’s bendalloy burned extremely quickly. He’d have to drop the bubble before too long.

“Plan?” Marasi asked.

“Not dyin’.”

“Anything more detailed than that?”

“Not dyin’ … today?”

She gave him a pointed look. Another pair of bullets zipped overhead while, outside the speed bubble, Dechamp’s body hit the ground.

“We’ve gotta get close to them,” Wayne said, slipping one of his dueling canes out from the loop on his belt.

“That’s going to be hard,” Marasi said. “I think they’re scared of you.”

“Yeah?” Wayne asked, sounding encouraged. “You really think?”

“They’re unloading enough ammunition to take down a small army,” Marasi said, ducking as a bullet entered the speed bubble, “and they opened fire even though Dechamp was caught in the barrage. While I doubt he meant much to them, it indicates they were scared enough that they didn’t dare waste a moment to wait for him to climb back into the grave.”

Wayne nodded slowly, grinning. “How ’bout that. I gots me a *reputation*. I wonder…”

Marasi glanced behind them. This grave was near several others that had been left open earlier, waiting for occupants. “Can you get your speed bubble big enough to include one of those other graves from in here?”

He followed her gaze, then rubbed his chin. “The closest one maybe, if I drop this bubble and move to the back of this grave before makin’ another.” He couldn’t move a bubble once it was in place, and couldn’t leave its confines without it dissipating.

“So we have to get them to come check on our corpses,” Marasi said. “Which might be hard, if they’re really that scared of you.”

“Nah,” Wayne said, “might actually be easy.”

“How—”

“Runnin’ outta time,” Wayne said. “You still got that little popgun in your purse?”

She pulled out the small pistol. “It has terrible range,” she said, “and only two shots.”

“Don’t matter none,” Wayne said. “Once I drop this, fire it at the fellows. Then be ready to move.”

She nodded.

“Here we go,” Wayne said.

The bubble dropped.

Mists leaped back into motion, swirling above, and the sudden sound of gunfire pervaded the graveyard. Dechamp twitched, and he gasped, eyes going glassy in the lanternlight. Marasi waited until the assailants stopped shooting, the cracks of their guns echoing in the night. Then she leveled her little gun and squeezed off two shots toward the shadows.

She ducked back down, uncertain what that was supposed to have accomplished. “You realize we’re now trapped *and* unarmed, Wayne.”

“Yup,” he said. “But if those fellows are really bothered by my fearsome reputation…”

“What?” Marasi asked, glancing toward him as he peeked over the edge. A few cracks sounded as the dark figures fired back, but it wasn’t as frantic as before. What was …

“There!” Wayne said, leaping toward the back of the grave and then popping up a speed bubble. “Ha! They came prepared, they did. Good men.”

Marasi risked peeking up again. She came almost face-to-face with a spinning piece of dynamite frozen in the air, the wick spraying sparks and smoke that mixed with the mists. She yelped, scrambling back. It was almost to the speed bubble.

“Across we go,” Wayne said, taking off his top hat and tossing it out of their grave toward the next one. He scrambled after it. Marasi joined him, staying low and hoping that the attackers wouldn’t notice. Wayne’s speed bubble would make them blurs to the eyes of the men, but it was dark and the mists would help obscure things.

She slid across and down into the other grave, which was deeper than the first. Wayne nodded to her, then dropped the bubble.

Marasi pressed her back to the side of the grave, squeezed her eyes shut, plugged her ears, and counted in her head. She only reached two before an explosion shook the ground and dropped a wave of dirt into their grave. Rusts! People must have heard that halfway across the city.

She glanced at Wayne, who took out his other dueling cane and twirled one in each hand. She heard footsteps scraping outside, and imagined the shadowy attackers cautiously creeping up to check on people they’d supposedly killed.

Can you beat them on your own? Marasi half whispered, half mouthed at Wayne.

He grinned and mouthed back, *Does a guy wif no hands got itchy balls?* He grabbed the side of the grave and hauled himself out. The mists above froze a moment later as Marasi was caught in a speed bubble—Wayne, putting one up and trapping half the men nearby in it with him.

She was accustomed, by now, to the sound of wood on a man's skull, but it still made her wince. The speed bubble dropped as someone managed to get a shot off, but more groaning and cursing followed.

A short time later Wayne appeared at the top of the grave, backlit by the flickering lantern in the mists. He shoved his dueling canes into their loops, then knelt and held out his hand.

Marasi reached up to accept his help from the grave.

"Actually," Wayne said, not taking her hand, "I was hopin' you'd hand me my hat."

* * *

"We'll send for your carriage, Lord Waxillium," said the assistant house steward. "We're terribly sorry about the unfortunate occasion of your lady's distress. You're certain she ate nothing here that might disagree with her?"

"She had only drinks," Wax said, "and few of those at that."

The cook relaxed visibly. She towed one of the maids away by the arm as soon as she saw that Wax had noticed her. He stood in the doorway of a guest chamber, and behind him Steris lay on the bed, eyes closed.

The assistant steward—an aged Terriswoman in the proper robes—clicked her tongue softly, looking over her shoulder toward the vanishing cook and maid. Despite her displeasure, Wax could tell that she too was relieved to hear that the food at the party couldn't be blamed. No need for the other guests to worry.

A piercing voice echoed down the hallway. Someone—a man with a high-pitched tone—was announcing the reception's speaker. Wax could hear easily; the introducer was assisted by electric amplifiers. It seemed the Tarcsel girl's devices had spread even to New Seran. The assistant steward took an unconscious step back toward the ballroom.

"Feel free to go," Wax told her. "We'll wait here for a half hour or so to be certain my lady is well rested, and by then our carriage will certainly be waiting."

"If you're certain.…"

“I am,” Wax said. “Just see to it that we’re not disturbed. Miss Harms grows most discomforted by noises when she’s ill.”

The steward bowed and retreated down the hallway toward the ballroom. Wax clicked the door closed, then approached the bed where Steris lay. She cracked an eye open, then glanced at the door to be sure it was closed.

“How do you feel?” Wax asked.

“Nauseated,” Steris said, half propping herself on one elbow. “That was a tad hasty on my part, wasn’t it?”

“Haste was appreciated,” Wax said, checking the wall clock. “I’ll give it a few minutes to make sure the hall is clear, then duck out. I’m not certain how long Kelesina will be away, but I’ll need to move quickly to learn anything.”

Steris nodded. “Do you think they might have her here? Your sister, I mean.”

“Unlikely,” Wax said. “But anything is possible. I’ll settle for a lead of any sort.”

“What’s she like?”

“She seemed like your average full-of-herself noblewoman. Certain that —”

“Not Lady Kelesina, Waxillium. Your sister.”

“I…” Wax swallowed, checking the clock. “I haven’t seen her in decades, Steris.”

“But you work so eagerly to rescue her.”

He sighed, settling down beside Steris. “She was always the bold one, when we were kids. I was careful, earnest, trying so hard to figure out what to do. And Telsin … she seemed to have it all in hand. Until I left the Village and she stayed.”

“More Terris than you, then.”

“Maybe. I always thought she hated the place, considering how often she found excuses to escape. Then she stayed.” He shook his head. “I never knew her, Steris. Not as I should have. I was too focused on myself. I can’t help feeling that I failed everyone—Mother, Father, Telsin herself—by not remaining close to her when I was out in the Roughs. And I'm failing them again by leaving her under my uncle's control."

Steris, still lying on the bed, squeezed his hand.

"I'll find her," Wax said. "I'll make it right. I ran to the Roughs, thinking I didn't need any of them. But as the years pass, Steris, I find I want less and less to be alone. I can't explain it, I guess. She's my *family*. My only family."

Outside, a new voice started talking. Introduction done, Lord Severington had begun his speech. Wax glanced at the clock, then stood. "All right. I need to go and explore while everyone else is distracted by the speech."

Steris nodded, then swung her feet over the side of the bed and took a deep breath.

"You should wait here," Wax said. "This could be dangerous."

"Have you forgotten what I said last night?" she asked.

"The safest place to be is most certainly *not* near me, Steris," Wax said.

"Regardless, you may need to escape quickly. There won't be time to come back for me. And if you're spotted, someone will wonder why you are alone—but if we're together, we can say we were just leaving, and were looking for the way to our carriage."

Those were good arguments. He reluctantly nodded, motioning for her to follow. She did so with alacrity, waiting beside the door as he opened it and peeked out. He could hear Lord Severington's voice even better.

"… time to show those in Elendel that their tyranny is not only unjust, it is against the will of the Survivor, who died in the name of freedom.…"

The hallway was empty. Wax stepped out, Steris at his side. "Try not to look like you're sneaking," he suggested softly.

She nodded, and together they moved down a long hallway set with brass gas lamps that had been converted to electricity. According to the mansion layout he had memorized, the ballroom and these small guest quarters were in their own wing to the east. If they moved west along this hallway, took this corner …

They passed under an archway into the mansion's central atrium, where a stream ran through the center of the mansion—diverted from one of the waterfalls, then cascading down a set of arranged rocks covered in chimes. Only a few lights glowed on the walls, giving the atrium a dusklike feeling.

“That humidity must be awful for the mansion’s woodwork,” Steris noted. “What practical reason could they have to run a *river* through the middle of their house?”

“I’m sure the reasons aren’t practical at all,” Wax said. Nearby, a maid passed in from another doorway. She saw him and froze.

Wax glared at her, standing up straight, putting as much nobleman sneer into his expression as he could muster. The young woman didn’t challenge them, but ducked her head and scuttled away, carrying her stack of linens.

They picked their way through the dim atrium. Above, broad glass windows would have given a view of the sky—but instead mist spun and swirled. Wax raised his fingers in greeting toward the distant mists, but stopped himself.

Harmony watched through those mists. Harmony the impotent, Harmony the meaningless. He set his jaw and turned away from the windows, leading Steris along a path in the indoor garden, which was set with small rocks and plants. From his maps, he guessed that Kelesina would be up on the second floor somewhere. As they followed the path northward, walking along the stream, he spotted a second-floor balcony.

“Honestly,” Steris muttered, “how can they even know if the water is *sanitary*? A river running through their gardens wasn’t enough? It has to go through the house itself?”

Wax smiled, studying that balcony. “I’m going to scout ahead up there. Speak loudly if someone confronts you. That will warn me, and I’ll sneak back.”

“Very well,” Steris said.

He dug in his pocket for a few coins, feeling old-fashioned as he burned steel and prepared to jump.

“Do you want something more substantial?” Steris asked.

He glanced at her, then down at her purse. “They searched your purse.”

“That they did,” she said, then took the hem of her skirt, lifting it up to the side and revealing a small handgun strapped to her thigh. “I worried they’d do something like that. So I made other plans.”

Wax grinned. “I could get used to having you around, Steris.”

She blushed in the dim light. “I might, uh, need your help getting the thing off.”

He knelt down, realizing that she’d used approximately seven rolls of tape to strap the gun in place. Also, being Steris, she’d worn shorts under the dress—in case she had to do what she was doing. Two pairs, judging by the bit of cloth he saw peeking out from under the top one.

Wax set to work extricating the gun. “I see you didn’t want this coming off accidentally.”

“I kept imagining it falling out and firing,” Steris said, “mid-dance.”

Wax grunted, working at her thigh beneath her dress. “You realize that if this were a play, this is exactly the point where someone would walk in on us.”

“Lord Waxillium!” Steris said. “What kind of theater have you been attending?”

“The kind you find in the Roughs,” Wax said, yanking the gun free. It proved to be one of his Riotings, a .22 six-shot he kept in his gun case but rarely used. It would do. He stood up, letting Steris settle her skirt back down. “Nice work.”

“I tried a shotgun first,” she said, blushing. “You should have seen me try to walk with one of those on my leg!”

“Stay out of sight, if you can,” he told her, then dropped a coin and launched himself toward the upper balcony.

* * *

Marasi stepped into the gravekeeper’s shack, clicking the door closed behind her. Wayne looked up from breaking the legs off a chair.

“Is that necessary?” Marasi asked.

“Dunno,” he said, snapping off another one. “It’s fun, though. How are our toughs?”

Marasi glanced out the window toward where a group of the local constables were carting away the last of the thugs. It turned out that setting off dynamite in the middle of the city was a fine way to get the attention of the authorities.

“They don’t know anything,” she said. “Hired muscle, paid and sent to do the hit. The ones who hired them mentioned your name, which turns out to have been a mistake.”

“I’m famous,” Wayne said happily, snapping another leg off. The hut had been thoroughly ransacked, drawers ripped out, cushions slit, furniture in shambles. Wayne looked at the chair leg he’d broken, apparently checking to see if it was hollow, then tossed it over his shoulder.

“We can try to follow the payments to those men,” Marasi continued, “but I suspect that Suit was too careful for this to be traced. And there’s no sign of the runner boy.”

Wayne grunted, stomping on the floor in one section, then taking a few steps and stomping again.

“The police brought an Allomancer,” Marasi continued. “And there’s no metal in that grave, so if the spike was ever there, it isn’t now.” She sighed, leaning back against the wall. “Rust and Ruin … I hope Waxillium is having more luck than we are.”

Wayne kicked a hole in the floor with the heel of his boot. Marasi perked up, then walked over as he fished around in a compartment he’d found.

“Aha!” he exclaimed.

“What is it?” Marasi asked.

Wayne brought out a bottle. “Dechamp’s hidden booze stash.”

“That’s all?”

“All? It’s great! A fellow like that hides his booze well. Too many other workers around to swipe the stuff.”

“So we’re at a dead end.”

"Well, there's an account book on the desk there that I found under a false bottom in the drawer," Wayne noted, taking a swig of the dark liquid he'd found. "Lists everybody what paid the people here for a grave robbin' in the last few years."

Marasi started. "When did you find that?"

"First," Wayne said. "Hardly had to search for it. The booze though, that they hid well. Good priorities, these folks."

Marasi stepped over some stuffing from one of the sofas and picked up the ledger. It didn't belong to Dechamp, but to the graveyard as a whole. It listed plots, what had been found in them, and to whom it had been sold.

It's so the boss of the place can keep track of what they've sold and what they haven't, Marasi thought. And to keep track of his minions, to be certain they didn't get any ideas about making their own side business of grave robbing.

Next to an entry from a few days back was a note from the manager. *If anyone comes looking to investigate this plot, send to me immediately.*

Marasi closed the book, then fished from her pocket the paper that listed workers at the graveyard. "Come on," she said to Wayne. "We have one more stop to make tonight."

green glow of his devices lighting him from below.

I ran alongside the car, matching pace with it while

my confidence.

As the car slid away from the dock, I leapt into the air.

(Continued below the fold!)

turret having a range of sixteen miles," said Severington. "Other improvements include reinfoced armor hulls,

on land and on the seas. From whom do we need protection?"

(Continued on back.)

Broken Gondola Strands Passengers

An unidentified disturbance halted the Zinc Line yesterday evening about sunset, according to the New Seran Transportation Authority. The NSTA carried passengers home the old-fashioned way, on donkeys and rickshaws down the switchbacks. We see this as proof for the need of a back-up emergency transport system.

(Continued on back.)

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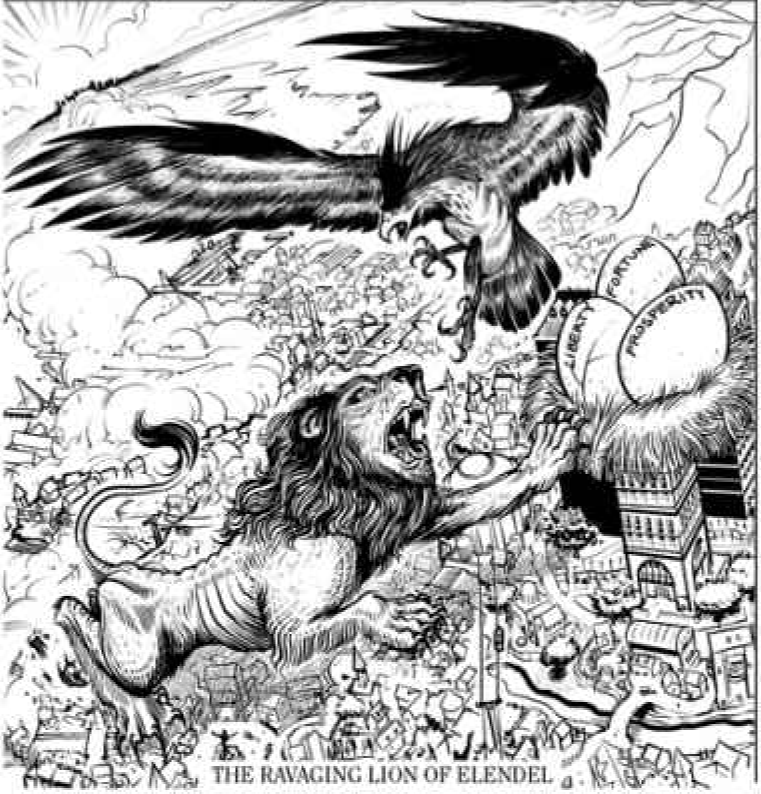

THE RAVAGING LION OF ELENDEL

The Ghastly Gondola!

The monks of Baz-Kor had trained me well, their practiced moves designed to get a leecher close enough to touch another Allomancer and drain them of their reserves. But it was the ballet lessons that enabled my jump from the platform onto the moving gondola.

I landed perfectly on the small ridge surrounding the bottom of the car and managed a firm grip on the outer door handles. I was safe for the moment, but the ridge I'd landed on was only a few inches wide. If I didn't find a way inside the gondola soon, even my ballet-enhanced toe strength would fail, dropping me almost a hundred feet to the city below, where rooftops glowed in the failing sun like boxings in an open purse.

Ethereal light emanated from inside the car, casting the haunted man's shadow against the windows. Each burst showed him striving to ready some arcane device, presumably to provide his escape.

From my satchel, I retrieved the device I had stolen from him when last we grappled. Covered in strange symbols and weirdly warm to the touch, it was much heavier than it appeared, and I had no clue how to operate it.

But ignorance is no match for invention. I slammed the rod of metal into the door glass, shattering it.

An uncanny explosion answered me, and my Baz-Kor reflexes pulled me abruptly to the side as a bolt howled past. It was neither an arrow nor a bullet, but a blast of pure energy shaped like a ghost. Its entirely too-human scream made the hairs on my neck stand on end, and the frame of the broken door rusted and crumbled in the wake of its passing. What manner of man could harness the powers of the dead? If the energy had enveloped me as well, would I also have disintegrated in an instant? I breathed deep and rushed into the car.

Strange mechanical devices littered the floor, and above

15

Templeton Fig smoothed the feathers of his dead white crow. He knew for a fact that this animal was an authentic albino, not some knockoff crafted by an opportunist who had heard of his collection. By now, he had seen enough dead animals bleached white to spot a fake.

He had stuffed this bird himself, prize of his collection, and set it looking over its shoulder with a small strip of rabbit skin in its beak. Such a magnificent creature. People always found it striking, as its coloring was the opposite of what they expected. Things like cats and dogs sometimes had white coloring naturally, and so his albino specimens of those weren’t as spectacular.

He replaced the glass dome over the crow, then stepped back and clasped his hands, looking at the white animals in a row. Frozen in death. Perfection. Only … the suckling boar. Had it been moved to the side? The housekeeper had better not have decided to dust his collection again.

He stepped up, twisting the glass jar that held the boar. Behind him, fire crackled in his hearth, though it wasn’t particularly cold outside. He even had the window open. He liked the contrast—warmth from the fire, a cool breeze from outside. As he was trying to get the boar just right, the door to his study creaked.

“Templeton?” a quiet voice asked, peeking in. Destra had bags under her eyes, hair frazzled. Her nightgown seemed to have swallowed her. The woman had lost more weight. Soon she would be positively skeletal. “Are you coming to bed?”

“Later,” he said, looking back to his boar. There.

“*When* later?”

“Later.”

She winced at his tone and pulled the door closed behind her. The woman should know better than to disturb him. Sleep. How could he sleep until he knew what had happened at the graveyard? One did not disappoint the men with whom he had been dealing. They asked for something to be done, and you saw it done.

He would know soon. He stepped forward, moving his albino squirrel to the end of the line. Did it look better that way? He reached up and wiped the sweat from his brow, then moved the squirrel back. No, that wasn’t right either. Then how was he to—

His fire stopped crackling.

Templeton’s breath caught. He turned slowly in place, fishing in his vest pocket for his handkerchief. The fire was still there, but it was *motionless*. Trell’s soul! What could have frozen the flames?

Something thumped on his door. Templeton backed away, fingers clawing at his pocket, still seeking that handkerchief. The door thumped again, and his back hit the shelf where he kept his collection. He tried to whisper an inquiry, but he was having trouble breathing.

The door burst open and the gravedigger Dechamp—eyes staring sightlessly, blood covering his shirt—fell into the room.

Templeton screamed then, scuttling away from the door, and put his back to the far wall of his small den. His fingers found the windowsill, gripping it for strength as he stared at the corpse lying in the doorway.

Something tapped on his window.

Templeton squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to look. Frozen fire. A body on his floor. He was dreaming. It was a nightmare. It wasn't possible. …

Tap. Tap. Tap.

He found his handkerchief finally and clutched it, his eyes squeezed shut.

"Templeton." The rasping voice drifted in through the window.

Templeton turned slowly and faced the window. He opened his eyes.

Death stood outside.

Cloaked in black, Death's face was hidden beneath the hood—but two metal spikes protruded from the cowl, catching the firelight on their heads.

"I'm dead," Templeton whispered.

"No," Death whispered. "You can die when I say. Not before."

"Oh, *Harmony*."

"You are not His," Death whispered, standing in the darkness outside. "You are mine."

"What do you want from me? Please!" Templeton slumped to his knees. He forced himself to glance back toward Dechamp. Would that body rise? Would it come for him?

"You have something of mine, Templeton," Death whispered. "A spike." He raised his arms, letting the cloak shift back and expose white skin. A spike was stuck through one arm. The other arm was bare, save for a bloody hole.

"It wasn't my fault!" Templeton screamed. "They insisted! I don't have it!"

"Where."

"Sent by courier!" Templeton said. "To Dulsing! I don't know more. Oh, please. Please! They demanded I recover the spike for them. I didn't know it was yours! It was just a rusting piece of metal. I'm innocent! I'm…"

He trailed off, realizing that the fire had started crackling again. He blinked, focusing again on the window. It was empty. A … a dream after all? He turned and found Dechamp's corpse still leaking blood on the floor.

Templeton whimpered and huddled down. He was honestly relieved when the constables burst into the room a short time later.

* * *

Wayne shucked the awful, heavy cloak and held up his arm, healing his wounds. Not much left in his metalmind. He was going to have to be sparing after this. Those bullet wounds earlier had taken a lot out of him.

"You didn't need to *actually* cut holes in your arm, Wayne," Marasi said, joining him in the garden—he'd trampled some very nice petunias to get to the window.

"Course I did," Wayne replied, wiping away the blood. "You've gotta be *authentic*." He scratched at his head, and shifted the wires that held two half spikes hovering in front of his eyes.

"Take that thing off," Marasi said. "It looks ridiculous."

"He didn't think so," Wayne said. Inside the house, the constables dragged Templeton Fig away. The information in the ledger Wayne had found should be enough to see him well and truly incarcerated. Poor chap. He didn't really do anything *wrong*. You can't steal from a person that's already dead. But then, people were strange about their stuff. Wayne had given up on trying to figure out all their little rules.

He'd send the fellow some fruit in prison. Might make him feel better. "How was the accent?" he asked.

"Worked well enough."

"I wasn't sure how Death 'imself would sound, you know? I figured all important-like, like Wax when he's tellin' me to take my feet off the furniture. Mixed with some real *old*-soundin' tones, like a grandfather's grandfather. And grindy, like a man what is choking to death."

"In fact," Marasi said, "he's quite articulate, and not at all 'grindy.' And the accent is strange—not like anything I've heard before."

Wayne grunted, taking off his head spikes. "Can you do it for me?"

"What? The accent?"

Wayne nodded eagerly.

"No. Not a chance."

"Well, next time you meet that guy, tell 'im he's gotta come talk to me. I need to hear what he sounds like."

"What does it matter?"

"I gotta hear," Wayne said. "For next time."

"Next time? How often do you expect you'll be imitating Death?"

Wayne shrugged. "This is the fourth so far. So you never can tell." He took the last swig of Dechamp's brandy, then slung his cloak over his shoulder and started through the mists back toward the road.

"Dulsing," Marasi said.

"You know it?"

"It's a little farming settlement," Marasi said. "Maybe fifty miles northeast of New Seran. I read about it in my textbooks—there was a landmark water rights case there—but it's isolated and tiny, barely worth anyone's time. What in the world does the Set want with it?"

"Maybe they like their tomatoes real fresh," Wayne said. "I know I do."

Marasi grew silent, obviously deep in thought, worried for some reason. Wayne left her to it, digging out his tin of gum, tapping it, then flipping it open and selecting one of the soft, powder-covered balls to chew. So far as he was concerned, this had been a bang-up night. Dynamite, a nice brawl, free brandy, and getting to scare the piss out of someone.

It was the simple things that made his life worth living.

* * *

Wax had little luck with the first set of rooms he scouted. Though they supposedly belonged to Kelesina, they proved to be empty. He was tempted to ransack them for information, but decided that would take too long—and would be too incriminating at the moment. Being discovered lost in a hallway was excusable; being discovered going through a lady's desk drawers was another thing entirely.

He prowled back to the atrium and checked on Steris, gave her a wave, then continued down another hallway. This one bordered the outer wall and had windows open to the mists, which streamed in with their own miniature waterfalls. Likely some servant had the duty to close those windows on a misty night, but had gotten distracted by the party.

He listened at a set of doors, and heard nothing other than a voice drifting in from the window—the voice of Lord Severington, still plowing through his speech in the ballroom. With the amplification devices, Wax could make out a word here and there.

"… suffer the rule … new Lord Ruler?… improper taxation … era must end…"

I will have to give that more attention, Wax thought, prowling through the hallway toward the next set of rooms. Severington was mayor of Bilming, the port city west of Elendel. It was the only major one in the Basin besides Elendel itself—and was an industrial powerhouse. If conflict *did* come, they'd be spearheading it.

They're spearheading it now, Wax realized as more words drifted up to him.

He continued down the hallway, listening at the next set of doors. He was about to turn away, when he heard a voice. There was someone inside. Wax crouched down, ear to the door, wishing he had a Tineye along to listen for him. That voice …

That was his uncle.

Wax pressed his ear up against the door, heedless of how he'd look to someone entering the hallway. Rusts … he couldn't make out much. A half word here and there. But it *was* Edwarn. Another voice spoke, and that was almost certainly Kelesina.

The gap under the door was dark. Wax put his hand to his pocket and the handgun secreted there, then turned the door's knob and eased it open. Beyond was some kind of study, completely dark but for the thin strip of light under the door on the far side. Wax slipped inside, closed the door behind him, and scuttled through the room—stifling a curse as he smacked his arm on an end table. Heart thumping, he put his back to the wall beside the other door.

“Never mind that,” his uncle was saying. His voice was muffled, as if he were speaking through a cloth or a mask or something. “Why have you interrupted me? You know the importance of my work.”

“Waxillium knows about the project,” Kelesina said. “And he’s found one of the coins. He’s acting stupid, but he *knows*.”

“The diversions?”

“He’s not biting.”

“You’re not trying hard enough then,” Suit said. “Kidnap one of his friends and leave a letter, purportedly from one of his old enemies. Challenge his wits, draw him into an investigation. Waxillium cannot resist a personal grudge. It will work.”

“The train robbery didn’t,” Kelesina said. “What of that, Suit? We wasted vital resources, important connections I had spent years cultivating, on that attack. You promised that if we attacked while he was on board, he wouldn’t be able to resist investigating. Yet he ignored it. Left Ironstand that same night.”

Wax felt a chill as a whole set of assumptions shifted within him. The train robbery … had it been a *distraction*, intended to draw his attention away from pursuing the Set?

“Recovering the device,” Suit said, “was worth the risk.”

“You mean the device Irich immediately lost?” Kelesina demanded. “That one shouldn’t be trusted with important missions. He’s too eager. You should have let me recover the item once Waxillium was off the train.”

“There was a good chance he’d take the bait,” Edwarn said. “I know my nephew; he’s probably still itching to go after those bandits. If he’s at your party instead, then you aren’t doing your duty properly. I haven’t time to hold your hand on this, Kelesina. I need to be off to the second site.”

Wax frowned. The train hadn’t been just a distraction, it seemed. But the words left him with a deeper sense of worry. He’d chased half a dozen leads during the last year, anticipating that he was close on the heels of his uncle. How many of those had been plants? And how many of his other cases had been intentional distractions? And Ape Manton? Was he really even in New Seran? Likely not.

Edwarn spoke a truth. He knew Wax well. Too well, for a man he'd barely seen in the last twenty years.

"Well," Suit said, "you have your chance now to recover the device, as you promised you could. How is that going?"

"It wasn't in the things he checked at the party," Kelesina said. "We snuck a spy among the hotel staff, and she will search for it in his rooms. I'm telling you, Irich—"

"Irich was punished," Suit said. Why did his voice sound so much smaller than Kelesina's? "That is all you need know. Recover it for me, and other mistakes might be forgiven. It is only a matter of time before they accidentally use Allomancy near it."

"And *then* will we see this 'miracle' you keep promising, Suit?" she demanded. "A few more speeches like this one, and Severington will have the entirety of the Basin whipped into a frenzy. Completely ignoring that Elendel has us outmanned and outgunned."

"Patience!" Suit said, sounding amused.

"*You* try to be patient. They're bleeding us dry. You promised to crush that city, provide an army, and—"

"Patience," Suit repeated softly. "Stop Waxillium. That is your part of the bargain now. Keep him in the city; keep him distracted."

"That's *not* going to work, Suit," Kelesina said. "He knows too much already. That damn shapeshifter must have told him—"

"You let it escape?"

Kelesina was silent.

"I thought," Suit said, voice growing cold, "that you had disposed of the creature. You presented its spike to me, claiming the other had been destroyed."

"We … may have assumed too quickly."

"I see," Suit said.

The two did not speak for a protracted moment. Wax raised his gun beside his head, sweat trickling down his brow in the dark room. He toyed with breaking in right then. He had evidence on Kelesina in the form of the wounded kandra and his own testimony. Several people died in that blast. Murder.

But did he have enough against Edwarn? Would his uncle just slip away again? Rusts, an army? They spoke of destroying Elendel. Dared he wait? If he took her and Suit right now, she might break, testify against him—

Footsteps.

They came from the hallway outside. As they approached the door, he made a snap decision, dropping a coin—it wasn't the special one, he had that in a different pocket—and Pushing.

Light from the hallway poured into the room as the door opened, revealing the steward from before. She crossed the room in a rush, and blessedly didn't turn on the room's lights—instead walking straight to the doorway that Wax had been listening at.

She didn't look up and see Wax pressed to the ceiling above her, Pushing against a coin she walked right over in her haste to knock on the door. Kelesina called for her to enter.

"My lady," the steward said in an urgent tone. "Burl sent me word while watching the party for Allomancers. He sensed someone using metals in this direction."

"Where is Waxillium?"

"His fiancée was sick," the steward said. "We brought her to a guest room to recover."

"Curious," Uncle Edwarn said. "And where is he now?"

Wax dropped to the floor with a thump, leveling his gun at the people inside the room. "He's right here."

The steward spun, gasping. Kelesina rose from her seat, eyes wide. And Uncle Edwarn …

Uncle Edwarn wasn't in the room. The only thing there was a boxy device on the table in front of Kelesina.

16

“Why, Waxillium!” the box said, projecting his uncle’s voice. “So good to hear your dulcet tones. I presume your entrance was properly dramatic?”

“It’s a telegraph for voices,” Wax said, stepping forward. He kept his gun on Kelesina, who backed up to the wall of the small room. She’d gone completely pale.

“Something like that,” Edwarn said, his voice sounding small. The electric mechanism didn’t reproduce it exactly. “How is Lady Harms? I hope her ailment was nothing too distressing.”

“She’s fine,” Wax snapped, “no thanks to the fact that you tried to have us all killed on that train.”

“Now, now,” Edwarn said. “That wasn’t the point. Why, killing you was an afterthought. Tell me, did you look into the casualties on the train? One passenger killed, I believe. Who was he?”

“You’re trying to distract me,” Wax said.

“Yes, I am. But that doesn’t mean I’m lying. In fact, I’ve found that telling you the truth is a far better method in general. You should look into the dead man. You’ll be impressed by what you find.”

No. Stay focused. “Where are you?” Wax demanded.

“Away,” Suit said, “on matters of *great* import. I do apologize for not being able to meet you in person. I offer up Lady Kelesina as a measure of my condolences.”

“Kelesina can go to hell,” Wax said, grabbing the box and lifting it, nearly yanking the wires in the back from the wall. “Where is my sister!”

“So many impatient people in the world,” Edwarn’s voice said. “You really should have focused on your own city, Nephew, and kept your attention on the little crimes fed to you. I’ve tried being reasonable. I fear I’m going to have to do something drastic. Something that will be certain to divert you.”

Wax felt cold. “What are you going to do, Suit?”

“It’s not about what I’m going to do, Nephew. It’s about what I’m *doing*.”

Wax glanced toward Kelesina, who had been reaching for the pocket of her dress. She raised her hands, frightened, right as something enormous *smashed* into Wax. He stumbled against the table, overturning it.

Wax blinked in shock. The steward! She’d grown to incredible strength, arms bulging beneath her robes, neck thick as a man’s thigh. Wax cursed, raising his gun, which the steward immediately slapped from his hand.

His wrist screamed in pain and he winced, *Pushing* on the nails in the wall to throw himself in a roll across the floor away from the steward. He came up fishing in his pocket for coins, but the steward wasn’t focused on him. She grabbed Wax’s gun off the floor, then turned toward Kelesina, who screamed.

Oh no …

The shot left his ears ringing. Kelesina fell limp to the floor, blood dribbling from the hole in her forehead.

“He killed her!” a voice screamed from the doorway outside. Wax spun to find the maid he’d seen earlier standing there, hands to her face. “Lord Ladrian *killed* our lady!” The woman ran away screaming the words over and over, although she’d obviously had a clear view of the room.

“You bastard!” Wax shouted toward the box.

“Now, now,” the box said. “That’s patently false, Waxillium. You have a very clear understanding of my parentage.”

The steward walked over to Kelesina, fishing at something on Kelesina’s body. Then, for some reason, the steward shot the dead woman again.

Either way, this gave Wax a chance to seize the box, which had fallen from the table near him.

“You’d better be careful, Nephew,” the box said. “I’ve told them to kill you if they can. In this case, a dead scapegoat will work as well as a living one.”

Wax roared, ripping the box free of the wall and Pushing it out the doorway, into the next room. He brought his hand up and Pushed back on the gun in the steward’s hand as she tried to aim it at him.

She cursed in Terris. Wax turned and scrambled from the smaller room into the one beyond, where he’d first hidden from the steward. He kicked the door shut to give himself some cover, then Pushed on his coin from before and leaped over a couch, soaring through the room. He scooped up the box communication device and skidded out into the hallway.

Half a dozen men in black coats and white gloves were advancing down the hallway toward him. They froze in place, then leveled their weapons.

Rusts!

Wax Pushed on the frames of the windows and reentered the room as the men opened fire. The inner door into the room that had held the telegraph opened, and Wax Allomantically shoved it back, cracking it into the steward’s face.

Another way out. Servants’ corridors? Blue lines pointed all around him and he looked for one out of place … there! He Pushed on it, opening a hidden door in the wall which led into a small passage, lit with dangling lightbulbs, that servants used. Still carting the telegraph box, he leaped through it as men piled into the sitting room behind him.

The weaving maze of passages let him keep ahead of them, though he did have to spend a coin taking one of them out as they got too close. That drove the others back, but notably, he couldn’t sense any metal on their bodies.

Aluminum weapons. This was one of Suit’s kill squads, likely contacted and sent into action the moment Kelesina had telegraphed him.

Wax burst out of the passageways into a room that he hoped would let him circle back toward the atrium. If they’d found Steris …

He dashed through a conservatory, lit by several dim electric lights and lined with maps on the walls, and entered one of the hallways he’d explored earlier. Excellent. He charged toward the central atrium, but as soon as he reached the balcony’s stairway down, something leaped from the shadows and blindsided him.

The Terriswoman, face bleeding from where the slammed door had broken her nose, growled and grabbed him around the neck. He Pushed a coin up at her, but it didn’t have time to gain momentum. It hit her in the chest, then stayed there as he Pushed on it, trying to push her off. He strained, his vision growing dark, until a fist punched the Terriswoman across the face.

She let go, stumbling back and shaking. Wax gasped for breath, looking up at MeLaan looming over him.

“Rusts!” she said with a deep bass voice. “You *did* start without me.”

The Terriswoman came charging in again, and Wax rolled to the side, fishing for coins. He brought up his last three in a handful as the steward punched MeLaan across the face. Something cracked audibly, and Wax hesitated as the steward stumbled back, clutching her mangled hand, the knuckles apparently shattered, the thumb ripped almost free.

MeLaan grinned. Her face had split where she’d been struck, revealing a gleaming metal skull underneath. “You really should be careful what you punch.”

The Terriswoman lurched to her feet, and MeLaan casually grabbed her own left forearm in her right hand and *ripped* it off, revealing a long, thin metal blade attached to the arm at the stump. As the Terriswoman came for her, MeLaan thrust the weapon through the woman’s chest. The steward gasped and collapsed to her knees, then deflated like a punctured wineskin.

“Harmony, I love this body,” MeLaan said, glancing toward Wax with a goofy grin on her face. “How did I ever consider wearing another?”

“Is that whole thing aluminum?” Wax asked.

“Yup!”

“It must be worth a fortune,” Wax said, standing and putting his back to the wall. The balcony was in front of him, the hallway he’d come down to his left. The kill squad would be following soon.

“Conveniently, I’ve had a few hundred years to save up,” MeLaan said. “It—”

Wax pulled her to cover beside the wall with him; she was actually lighter than he had anticipated, considering that she had metal bones.

“What?” she asked softly.

Wax raised a coin, listening for footfalls. On the balcony before him, the Terriswoman twitched. When he heard the footstep he increased his weight a fraction, then spun around the corner and grabbed the first man’s gun in one hand, twisting it toward the floor. It fired ineffectively, and Wax pressed his other hand against the man’s chest and Pushed on the coin there.

Man and coin went flying back down the hallway toward his fellows, who leaped to the side. Wax was left with the aluminum gun, which he flipped in the air and caught, squeezing off four shots. The first pulled a little left, hitting the enemy in the arm, but he was able to place the next shots right in their chests.

All three dropped. The fourth man groaned from the floor where Wax had Pushed him.

“Damn,” MeLaan said.

“Says the woman who just ripped half her arm off.”

“It goes back on,” MeLaan said, picking up her forearm, which she slid back over the blade. Blood dribbled from where she’d broken the skin. “See? Good as new.”

Wax snorted, tucking the stolen aluminum gun into his waistband. “You can get out on your own?”

She nodded. “Want me to recover the guns you checked?”

"Can you?"

"Probably."

"That would be wonderful." Wax walked to the Terriswoman and checked to see that she was dead, then fished in her pockets until he came up with the gun she'd used to kill Kelesina. There was something else in her pocket as well. A metal bracelet of pure gold.

The Terriswoman took this off Kelesina, Wax thought, turning it over in his fingers as he remembered the moment earlier, when the murderer had knelt beside Kelesina's body.

He burned steel, and his hunch proved correct. While he could sense the bracelet, the line was much thinner than it should have been. This was a metalmind, and one heavily Invested with healing power.

"Was Kelesina Terris?"

"How should I know?" MeLaan asked.

He pocketed the bracelet and grabbed the box telegraph device—which he wanted to send to Elendel for inspection—and tossed it to MeLaan. "Bring that, if you don't mind, and meet us at the hotel. Be ready to leave the city. I doubt we're staying the night."

"And you were so certain we'd be out of here without a fight."

"I never said that. I said it wouldn't get so bad that I needed Wayne. And it didn't."

"A semantic technicality."

"I'm a nobleman. Might as well learn *something* from my peers." He saluted her with the small gun, then dropped off the balcony and used a coin to slow himself. "Steris?"

She crawled from a nearby shrub. "How did it go?"

"Poorly," Wax said, looking up toward the ceiling, then removing his dinner jacket. "I may have accidentally let them implicate us in Lady Kelesina's murder."

"Bother," Steris said.

"Their evidence will depend on whether they can trace the bullets back to me," Wax said, "and whether they recover any of my prints from the area.

Either way, they’ll be producing fake witnesses to try to make it look like I came down here *specifically* to assassinate Kelesina. Grab on.”

Steris grabbed him with, he noted, no small amount of eagerness. She really did enjoy this part. He took the bullets from his .22 and held them in one hand, then launched off the coin below to shoot them toward the ceiling. He flung the bullets toward the skylights and Pushed them in a spray to weaken a window, then raised his arm—wrapped in his jacket—over his head and crashed them through the glass and out into the swirling mists.

They landed on the roof as Wax got his bearings. Out in the mists, he felt better almost immediately, and his hand—which had been smarting where the Terriswoman smacked his gun away—stopped throbbing.

“Did you learn anything useful?” Steris asked.

“Not sure,” Wax said. “Most of what I overheard was about a rebellion against Elendel. I know Edwarn is heading somewhere important. He called it the second site? And he said something about what I think is that little cube Marasi found.”

He pulled her tight again, then sent them in a Push upward through the mists in the direction of their hotel. She held to him tightly, but watched the lights of the city beneath with awe.

“He had Kelesina murdered,” Wax said. “I should have seen it. Should have anticipated.”

“At least,” Steris said over the sound of the passing wind, “the mists are out. They’ll have trouble tracking us.”

“You did well tonight, Steris. Very well. Thank you.”

“It was engaging,” she said as he dropped them onto a rooftop. Her smile, which she let out readily, warmed him. She was proof that, despite his dislike of the politics in the Basin, it had good people. Genuine people. Strikingly, he had been forced to realize something almost exactly like that about the Roughs after first moving there.

She was gorgeous. Like an uncut emerald sitting in the middle of a pile of fakes cut to sparkle, but really just glass. Her enthusiasm balanced, somewhat, his concern over what had happened. Missing Suit. Being implicated. Lessie would say …

No. He didn't need to think of Lessie right now. He smiled back at Steris, then pulled her tighter and Pushed, launching them straight up. Higher, up away from this district. The city's taller buildings were visible only as lines of lights in the night, pointing upward through the mists. He launched up off a rooftop, then passed a shaking gondola, moving by electricity and carrying a group of gawking passengers. It rocked as Wax launched them sideways from it toward the skyscrapers.

Two were near enough one another, and with a quick series of furious Pushes, he was able to throw himself and Steris up through the swirling mists in a succession of arcs, first one way, then the other. He crested the tops and Pushed off one, sending them up a little farther. He had hoped that with the elevation of this highest terrace of the city—

Yes. They burst from the mists into a realm seen by very few. The Ascendant's Field, Coinshots called it: the top of the mists at night. White stretched in all directions, churning like an ocean's surface, bathed in starlight.

Steris gasped, and Wax managed to hold them in place by Pushing against the tips of the two skyscrapers below. Without a third, he wasn't certain how long he could balance, but for the moment they remained steady.

"So beautiful…" Steris said, clinging to him.

"Thank you again," Wax said to her. "I still can't believe you snuck a gun into the party."

"It's only appropriate," Steris said, "that you would make a smuggler out of me."

"Just as you try to make a gentleman out of me."

"You're already a gentleman," Steris said.

Wax looked down at her as she held to him while trying to stare in every direction at once. He suddenly found something burning in him, like a metal. A protectiveness for this woman in his arms, so full of logic and yet so full of wonder at the same time. And a powerful affection.

So he let himself kiss her. She was surprised by it, but melted into the embrace. They started to drift sideways and arc downward as he lost his balance on his anchors, but he held on to the kiss, letting them slip back down into the churning mists.

* * *

Wayne put his feet up on the table in their hotel suite, a new book open in front of him. He'd picked it up earlier, when poking through the city.

"You oughtta read this thing, Mara," he called to Marasi, who paced back and forth behind his couch. "Strangest thing you ever heard. These blokes, they build this ship, right? Only it's meant to go *up*. Uses a big explosion or some such to send it to the stars. These other blokes steal it, right, and there's seven of them, all convicts. They go lookin' for plunder, but end up on this star what has no—"

"How can you read?" Marasi asked, still pacing.

"Well, I'm not right sure," Wayne said. "By all accounts, I should be dumber than a sack full o' noodles."

"I mean, aren't you nervous?" Marasi asked.

"Why should I be?"

"Something could go wrong."

"Nah," Wayne said. "I'm not along. Wax can only get into so much trouble without me to—"

Something hit the window, causing Marasi to jump. Wayne turned to see Wax clinging to one of the windowsills, Steris tucked under one arm like a sack of potatoes—well, a sack of potatoes that had a very nice rack, anyway. Wax pulled open the window, set Steris inside, then swung in himself.

Wayne popped a peanut into his mouth. "How'd it go?"

"Eh," Wax said. He had lost his dinner jacket somewhere, and blood—hopefully not his own—covered one arm of his shirt. His cravat drooped, half tied.

"We figured out where Suit and his people are likely holed up," Wayne said as Marasi ran over to check on her sister, who looked flustered, but alive and such.

“You’re kidding,” Wax said.

“Nope,” Wayne said, then grinned and popped a peanut. “What’d you find?”

“Clues about Marasi’s cube,” Wax said, pulling off his cravat. “And something about a building project, and a potential army. Suit’s timetable seems to be more advanced than I’d thought.”

“Cheery,” Wayne said. “So…”

Wax sighed, then pulled out his billfold and tossed a note at Wayne. “You win.”

“You had a *bet*?” Marasi demanded.

“Friendly wager,” Wayne said, making the note disappear. “Can I bring these peanuts when we go?”

“Go?” Marasi said, standing up.

Wayne thumbed toward Wax, who had pulled out his travel bag. “We’re leaving. Marasi, Steris, I’d suggest packing lightly. You have about fifteen minutes.”

“I’m already packed,” Steris said, standing up.

“I—” Marasi looked from him to her, seeming baffled. “What did you *do* at that party?”

“Hopefully,” Wax said, “not start a war. But I can’t say for certain.”

Marasi groaned. “You let him do this,” she accused Steris.

Steris blushed. Wayne always found that expression odd from her, seeing as how she had the emotions of a rock and all.

What followed was an energetic bout of motion as Wax and Marasi both ran to pack things. Wayne sidled up to Steris and popped a peanut in his mouth. “You got that preparin’-your-bags-early thing from me, didn’t you?”

“I … Well, yes, actually.”

“What will you trade me for it, then?” Wayne said. “Gotta have a good trade when you take stuff.”

“I’ll think about it,” Steris said.

Fifteen minutes later, the four of them piled into a carriage driven by MeLaan in her male body. A bedraggled Aunt Gin stood on the doorstep of her hotel watching them. She held a wad of cash in her hand—a wad that included the money Wayne had won off Wax. He'd left it as a tip on account of him putting his boots up on the furniture.

A furiously loud set of bells sounded in the distance, and it drew closer. "Is that the constables?" Aunt Gin asked, sounding horrified.

"Afraid so," Wax said, pulling the door closed.

The carriage lurched into motion, and Steris leaned out the window, waving farewell to the poor innkeeper.

"Framed for murder!" Steris called to her. "It's on page seventeen of the list I gave you! Try not to let them harass our servants too much when they arrive!"

* * *

A few hours later, Wax stepped up to a cliff in the darkness and let the mists enfold him.

He missed darkness. It was never dark in the city, not as it had been in the Roughs. Electric lights were only exacerbating the issue. Everything glowing, casting away the darkness—and with it, stillness. Silence. Solitude.

A man found himself when he was alone. You only had one person to chat with, one person to blame. He fished in his mistcoat pocket and was surprised to find a cigar. He thought he was out of these, good stout Tingmars brought down from Weathering.

He cut this one with his belt knife, then lit it with a match. He savored it, drawing in the smoke, holding it, then puffing it out to churn in the mists. A little bit of him to mix with Harmony. May He choke on it.

At his side, he turned a little metal spike over in his fingers. The earring VenDell had sent.

It was nearly identical to the one he'd used to kill Lessie.

Eventually, footsteps on pine needles signaled someone approaching. He pulled on his cigar, giving a warm glow to the mists and revealing MeLaan's face. Her feminine one. She'd finished changing, and was doing up the buttons on her shirt as she joined him.

"You going to get some sleep?" she asked softly.

"Maybe."

"Last I checked," she said, "humans still need it. Once in a while."

Wax pulled on his cigar, then blew out into the mists again.

"Suit wants you to go back to Elendel, I figure," MeLaan said. "He's trying to set it up so that you'll have no choice, so far as you see it."

"We're in a bad spot, MeLaan," Wax said. "The emissary that Aradel sends to a political rally ends up murdering the host? If the outer cities weren't tense before, they will be now. At the very best, it will be a huge political embarrassment. At the worst, I've started a war."

Wind blew, rustling pine branches he couldn't see. He couldn't even see MeLaan; clouds must have rolled in, blocking the starlight. Sweet, enveloping darkness.

"If there is war," she said, "Suit will have started it. Not you."

"I might be able to prevent it," Wax said. "Governor Aradel needs to know, MeLaan. If the outer cities are going to claim assassination—use it as the brand to start a bonfire—I can't just vanish. I *have* to get to Elendel. That way, I can claim I knew the New Seran justice system was corrupt, and so I fled to safety. I can make my case in the broadsheets before news spreads; I can convince Aradel I didn't kill the woman. If I do anything else, it will look like I'm hiding."

"Like I said," MeLaan said. "He's set it up so that you have no choice—so far as you see it."

"You see it differently?"

"I've been a lot of people, Ladrian. Seen through a lot of eyes. There's always another perspective, if you look hard enough."

He pulled on his cigar and held the smoke a long moment before letting it out in a slow dribble. MeLaan crept away. Did her kind need sleep? She'd implied they didn't, but he couldn't say for certain.

Alone with his cigar, he tried to sort through what he wanted to do. Go back to Elendel, as forced upon him by Suit's minions, or chase after the mystery—as forced upon him by Harmony's minions. He rolled the earring in his fingers, and confronted the hatred simmering inside of him.

He'd never hated God before. After Lessie's supposed death the first time, he hadn't blamed Harmony. Rusts, even after Bleeder had raised the question of why Harmony hadn't helped, Wax hadn't responded with hatred.

But now … yes, that hatred was there. You could take knocks, out in the Roughs. You lost friends. You sometimes had to kill a man you didn't want to kill. But one thing you never did: You never betrayed a companion. Friends were too rare a privilege out in those wilds, where everything seemed to want you dead.

By hiding the truth from him, Harmony had stabbed him square in the back. Wax could forgive a lot of things. He wasn't sure this was one of them.

His cigar eventually ran out. His questions lingered. By the time he hiked back toward their campsite, the mist was retreating for the night. He fed the horses—six of them, purchased at the New Seran bottom terrace shipping yards, along with a full-sized stagecoach used to do runs to the Southern Roughs.

They'd narrowly escaped New Seran. Galloping their carriage, they'd managed to descend the ramps before the police, but only after Wax had been forced to bring down a gondola line.

The police hadn't given chase after that, as if realizing they didn't have the resources to hunt someone like Waxillium Dawnshot, at least not without a lot of backup. Wax still wanted to be moving. Though he was tired to the bones, he couldn't let himself—or anyone else—rest long. Just in case.

As the others groggily piled into the vehicle, MeLaan took the reins from him and climbed up to the driver's seat. Wayne hopped into the spotter's seat beside her, and she gave him a grin.

"Where to, boss?" she asked, turning to Wax. "Back home?"

"No," Wax said. "We ride to Dulsing, the place Wayne and Marasi located." The direction of the building project.

“You found another perspective, I see,” MeLaan said.

“Not yet,” Wax said softly, climbing into the stagecoach. “But let’s see if Harmony dares try to give me one.”

PART THREE

17

Marasi had read a lot about life in the Roughs in her youth, and knew what to expect of a stagecoach trip: boredom, dust, and discomfort.

It was wonderful.

She had to forcibly keep herself from hanging out the window as Wayne occasionally did, watching the scenery pass. They weren't in the Roughs, but this was close enough. The smell of the horses, the bumps in the road, the rickety creak of the wood and the springs … She had seen and done some remarkable things during her time with Waxillium, but *this* really felt as if she were living in an adventure.

Waxillium reclined across from her, feet up on the seat next to her, a wide-brimmed hat over his eyes, face bristly from a day without shaving. He'd removed his boots, which sat on the floor beside his shotgun.

It seemed surreal to remember she'd even considered a relationship with him, now that so long had passed with them working together. No, she was not interested, no longer. But she *did* admire the perfect image of him there—the gun, the boots, and the hat.

Of course, that image was distorted by the sight of Steris curled up on the seat beside him, snoring softly with her head on his shoulder. In what kind of bizarre world did Marasi's punctilious half sister end up on the adventure? Steris belonged in a sitting room with a cup of tea and a dry book about horticulture, not riding cross-country in a stagecoach toward a potential army of Allomancers. Yet here she was, snuggled up against Dawnshot himself.

Marasi shook her head. She wasn't envious of Steris, which was—frankly—remarkable, considering their upbringings. It was very hard to hate Steris. You could be bored by her, confused by her, or frustrated with her—but hate her? Impossible.

Marasi got out her notebook to continue her report to VenDell and Constable-General Reddi, which she hoped to be able to send before reaching Dulsing.

Waxillium shifted, then tipped his hat back, eyeing her. "You should get some sleep."

"I'll rest when we stop."

"Stop?"

Marasi hesitated. They'd been going for half a day already, avoiding the main roads to evade potential pursuers from New Seran. They'd crossed several fields, and spent a full hour rattling along a stone ridge to bypass some farms below in a way that left little sign of their passage.

Their path lay almost directly northeast of New Seran, skirting the mountains to their right, staying to the foothills—which meant some ups and downs, but this was still good farmland. All of the Basin was, even here at the edges, where things were dryer than in the center.

"I thought that after stopping last night—" Marasi said. "Dear. You mean to go straight there?"

"'Straight' is an odd term," Waxillium said, "considering how much MeLaan has us weaving to avoid getting caught. But yes. Shouldn't be more than another four hours or so."

A train could have had them there in a fraction of that time, delivered in comfort. Maybe the outer cities did have reason to gripe about the way things were set up.

“Waxillium?” Marasi said as he shifted again.

“Mmm?”

“Do you think they’re real? The Bands of Mourning?”

He tipped back his hat all the way. “Did I ever tell you why I went to the Roughs?”

“As a youth?” Marasi said. “It was because you hated the politics, the expectations. Polite society that was anything but polite.”

“That’s why I left Elendel,” Waxillium said. “But why the Roughs? I could have gone to one of the outer cities, could have found a plantation somewhere to read books and live a quiet life.”

“Well…” Marasi frowned. “I guess I thought you always wanted to be a lawman.”

Waxillium smiled. “I wish I’d spotted it that easily. Should have. I spent my childhood tattling on other children for every little thing they did.”

“Then what?”

He settled back, closing his eyes. “I was chasing a legend, Marasi. Tales of the Survivor’s gold, riches to be had, stories to be made.”

“You?” Marasi started. “You were a *gentleman adventurer*?”

Waxillium winced visibly at the term. “You make me sound like that fool in the broadsheets. I tell you, Marasi, those first months were hard. Every other town was full of the unemployed from the mines shutting down, and I couldn’t enter a saloon without finding some fool baby-face like myself, up from the Basin with a head full of glory and treasure.”

“So you started hunting bounties,” she said. “You told me this part. Something about boots.”

“Eventually, yes,” Waxillium said, smiling. “Struggled for a long time up there before turning to bounties. At first, though, I had my eyes full of riches and gold. Took time to shake that out of me, but even then, becoming a lawman was about the cash. Started hunting men for money. And, well, there'd always been this streak in me that didn't like seeing people get pushed around. Ended up in Weathering. Just another forgotten, dried-out city in the Roughs with nobody to care about it. It was six years before someone gave me credentials and made it official."

The stagecoach cabin swayed on its straps. Up above, Marasi could hear Wayne and MeLaan chatting. So long as they weren't making out again while trying to drive.

"When VenDell told us about this, I didn't want the Bands to be real," Waxillium said, looking out the window. "I hated the thought of some foolish dream pulling me away again, after I'd finally found stability in Elendel. I didn't want that lure of excitement, the reminder of a world I'd come to love out there in the dust."

"So you think they *are* real."

"Here's the thing," he said, leaning forward, causing Steris to shift in her sleep. "My uncle hasn't had time to breed his Allomancers, as I suspect he's been doing. The plans he and the Set have concocted, they're long-term investments. But he promised *something* to Kelesina, and he really sounded like he thinks he can deliver. You have the device?"

Marasi pulled the small metal cube from her purse. Waxillium fished in his pocket and brought out his coin, the one some beggar had apparently given him. He held up the two next to each other, sunlight through the window gleaming off the cube and highlighting the otherworldly symbols on its sides.

"Something strange *is* going on, Marasi," Waxillium said. "Something important enough to draw my uncle's attention. I don't have the answers. I need to find them."

She found herself smiling at the intensity in his eyes. "It's not the treasure hunter that made you decide to go to Dulsing. It's the detective."

He smiled. "You were listening to what MeLaan said to me last night?"

Marasi nodded.

"You were supposed to be asleep," Waxillium said. He flipped the coin, caught it, then tossed the cube back to her. "Going to Aradel would have been the mature, prudent move, but I have to find the answers. And who knows? Maybe the Bands are real. If so, then getting them away from Suit is *at least* as important as informing the governor of what happened in New Seran.”

“You think your uncle is trying to make Allomancers with technology, rather than by birth.”

“A frightening power in the hands of a man like my uncle,” Waxillium said, leaning back into his seat. “Get some sleep. We’re probably going to infiltrate this building project in Dulsing during the night.”

He settled with his hat over his eyes again. Marasi felt she should do as he said, and so tried to doze off. Unfortunately, there were too many thoughts in her head for sleep.

After some time, she gave up and returned to her letter. In it, she explained what they’d done and discovered. She needed to send this soon. Perhaps she could find a telegraph station when they changed horses, and send the letter in time for it to make a difference.

Once done with the letter, she moved to her notes about the missing kandra spike. Kelesina, acting on behalf of the Set, had tried to kill ReLuur, and had assumed success. When Suit had demanded proof, she’d ordered the spike dug up and sent to him in Dulsing. But where would it be kept there? Someplace secure, presumably. How in the world was she going to find it?

She held up the little cube. Suit had asked after this. Could she use that somehow?

Marasi frowned, turning the cube. The sides had little grooves between them. She looked closer, and in the sunlight spotted something she hadn’t seen before. A tiny little knob hidden in one groove. It looked like … well, a switch. Nestled in, where it couldn’t be flipped accidentally.

She used a hairpin to reach in and flip the switch. It moved just as she’d expect it to.

A switch. It seemed so … mundane. This was either a mystical relic or some kind of secret technology. You didn’t use a switch on things like that;

you held them up to starlight, or spoke the special command phrases, or did a dance on the last day of the month while eating a kumquat.

The switch didn't seem to have done anything. So, Marasi swallowed and burned a pinch of cadmium.

The cube began to vibrate in her fingers.

Then the entire coach lurched, rocking as if it had been struck by something very hard. Marasi hit her head on the roof, then was slammed back down onto her seat.

The horses screamed, but MeLaan somehow kept them under control. Within moments, the coach had pulled to a stop.

"What the hell was that?" Waxillium said, hauling himself up off the floor, where he had ended up in a jumble with Steris.

Marasi groaned, sitting up and holding her head. "I did something stupid."

"How stupid?" Waxillium asked.

"I was testing the device," Marasi said, "and used Allomancy."

Wayne's head appeared at the door a moment later, hanging down from above. "Was that a speed bubble?"

"Yes," Marasi said.

"That jolt damn near killed the horses," Wayne said.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Waxillium helped Steris sit up. "What … what went wrong?" she asked, befuddled.

"Marasi used a speed bubble while we were moving," Waxillium said. "We hit the threshold and towed her out of it, popping the thing and lurching us from one time frame to the next."

"But, she used it on the train," Steris said.

"Speed bubbles move with you if you're on something massive enough," Waxillium said. "Otherwise, the spinning of the planet would pop you out of every one you made. The train was heavy and fast. The stagecoach is small and just slow enough. So—"

"So I should have known better," Marasi said, blushing. "I haven't done that since I was a kid. But Waxillium, it *buzzed*."

"What?"

"The cube, it—" Marasi started, realizing she'd dropped the cube in the confusion. She searched around frantically before finally locating it near his foot. She held it up triumphantly. "It had a switch."

"A switch?"

She turned it to the side, showing them the little switch. "You have to slip something small in to move it," she said. "But it works now."

He looked at it, baffled, then showed it to Steris, who squinted. "What kind of eldritch device," Steris said, "has an *on switch*?"

"Makes sense, I guess," Waxillium said. "You don't want your eldritch devices turning on accidentally."

"Might end up almost killing your stagecoach drivers," Wayne grumbled.

"It didn't stop your Allomancy?" Waxillium asked Marasi, rubbing his chin.

She shook her head. She could still sense her metal reserves. "It didn't seem to do anything."

"Huh." Waxillium held it up. "Could be dangerous."

"So we're testing it, then?" Wayne asked, hanging into the window.

"Of course we are," Waxillium said. "But *away* from the coach."

* * *

Wax held the vibrating cube in his hand. It did respond to his metal burning, but didn't seem to do anything else.

They'd stopped near a stand of towering walnut trees, and Wayne was filling his pockets while Marasi watched Wax experiment from a safe distance. MeLaan watered the horses at a stream down the way. Nearby, a field of carrots grew with green sprouts, completely uncultivated. The air smelled fresh, of life untouched.

He held up the buzzing cube and let his metals die off. The cube stopped vibrating. He burned them again, and it responded—starting slowly, but picking up after about a second or two. But what did it *do*? Why didn't it blank his Allomancy as it had on the train?

Maybe it doesn't work on the person activating it, he thought. That would make some kind of sense, though he couldn't fathom how it could tell. "Hey, Wayne," he said.

"Yeah, mate?"

"Catch."

Wax tossed the cube to him. Wayne caught it, then jumped as his belt—which held his metal vials and any coins on his person—ripped free from its breakaway straps and sprang away from him. He turned, watching it flop to the ground a good twenty feet down the hill, and when he approached it, it scooted away.

Wax ran toward him, and as he did, the shotgun in his leg holster pressed backward, as if being Pushed. The effect wore off a few seconds later, and by the time he reached Wayne, the cube had stopped buzzing.

Wayne held it up. "What was *that*?"

Wax plucked the device from his fingers as Marasi rushed over to join them. "It doesn't steal Allomancy, Wayne. It never did."

"But—"

"It takes the metal one is burning," Wax said, "and somehow … extends it. You saw. It Pushed your metal away, as if a Coinshot were there near you. The cube used Allomancy."

The three of them stood stunned, looking at the little device.

"We need to try it again," Wax said. "Wayne, hold this and burn your bendalloy. Marasi, go stand over there. Wayne, once you're ready, throw the cube to her."

They did as directed. Wax stood back. When Wayne ignited his metals, he suddenly became a blur inside his speed bubble. The cube zipped out an eyeblink later and soared through the air toward Marasi, deflected somewhat but still moving in the right direction.

It engaged just before reaching her, and she became a blur, zipping over to pick up the cube, then zipping back. It took a count of ten before the cube stopped working, dropping her into ordinary time.

“Did you see that?” Marasi said, awed, holding the cube. “It created a speed bubble for me. It *fed* off Wayne’s Allomancy, and replicated it!”

“It’s what we’ve been lookin’ for, then?” Wayne asked, joining them, having dropped his own bubble.

“Not quite,” Wax replied, taking the cube and holding it up. “But it’s certainly encouraging. It looks like you have to be an Allomancer to use this—it doesn’t grant new powers, but it does extend the ones you have. It’s like … like an Allomantic grenade.”

Marasi nodded eagerly. “Which means that the man on the train, the one who used this on us, is a Leecher. He can remove Allomancy in others, and he gave that power to the cube, which he threw at you.”

“It engages a second or so after you throw it,” Wax said with a nod. “Useful.”

“And it’s proof that Suit has technology he’s been hiding,” Marasi said.

“We knew that from the communication device,” Wax said, “but yes, this is even more curious. I’m half tempted to think all this talk of the Bands of Mourning came from rumors about this technology the Set has been developing.”

“And the symbols?”

“No idea,” Wax said. “Some kind of cipher they developed?” He tapped the cube, then handed the thing to Marasi.

“Why me?” she asked.

“It’s yours. You found it; you figured out how to turn it on. Besides, I have a feeling it’s going to be the most effective in your hands.”

She held it a moment, then her eyes widened. Being a Pulser wasn’t very useful when you were catching yourself in a bubble where you moved slowly compared to everyone else. However, if you could trap someone *else* in that bubble …

Wayne whistled softly.

“I’ll try not to lose it,” Marasi said, tucking the device away. “We’ll need to study it later, find out how it works.”

I wonder … Wax thought, remembering something else. He played his hunch, reaching into his pocket and fishing out the golden bracelet that Kelesina had been wearing.

He tossed it to Wayne.

“What’s this?” Wayne asked, holding it up toward the sky. “Pretty hoop o’ gold, that is. Who’d you trade this off of? I could use this, mate. It would make a nice metalmind.”

“I think it’s already one,” Wax said, deflating. It had been a silly idea in the first place.

Wayne gasped.

“What?” Marasi said.

“It’s a metalmind,” Wayne said. “Damn me, but it is. And I can *sense* it. Wax, you got your knife?”

Wax nodded, yanking his knife from his gunbelt, and when Wayne proffered his hand, he sliced a small cut along the back. It resealed immediately.

“Maaaate,” Wayne whispered. “It’s someone else’s metalmind, but I can *use* it.”

“Like VenDell said,” Wax said, taking the bracelet from Wayne’s fingers. “A metalmind with no Identity. Rusts. I have to flare my metal to even get the *faintest* line pointing to it. This thing must be stuffed full of power.”

More than any metalmind he’d ever sensed, in fact. He could usually push on those without too much trouble. He’d barely be able to shift this one.

“Why didn’t I notice what it was immediately?” Wayne said. “I had to be told. And, oh, rusts! This is proof of the Bands of Mourning, ain’t it?”

“No,” Wax said. “*I* can’t sense a reserve in the bracelet—I can’t use this, as I’m not a Bloodmaker. It’s not a metalmind anybody can use, just one that anyone with the right powers already can use.”

“That’s still remarkable,” Marasi said.

“And disturbing,” Wax said, staring at that innocent-looking loop. The only way to have created this would involve using a Feruchemist with two powers. So either the Set had access to full-blooded Feruchemists, or his fears were coming true. They'd figured out how to use Hemalurgy.

Or it's a relic, he thought. *There's that possibility.* Perhaps this and the box were artifacts of another time.

He tossed the bracelet back to Wayne. "How much is in it?"

"A heap," Wayne said. "But it's not endless. The reservoir got smaller when I healed that cut."

"Hang on to it, then," Wax said, turning as he heard his name. MeLaan was at the edge of the glade, waving. Wax left Wayne and Marasi, striding over to the tall, slender kandra woman, still worried about what these discoveries meant. What did the bracelet indicate? Was there more to be discovered? Metalminds that granted anyone who touched them incredible powers? For the first time, he really started to wonder. What if the Bands *were* real? What would happen to society if Metalborn powers were simply something you could purchase?

He trudged up to MeLaan. "I think you'll want to see this," she said, waving for him to follow her up the side of a steep hill covered in foliage. At the top, they had a view of the land to the northeast. Some was cultivated in rows and rings, but much was like what they'd just left—wilderness blooming with random patches of fruits or vegetables. A cool breeze blew across him, barely enough to temper the heat of the sunlight above.

Seeing it all, feeling that perfect breeze, made Wax realize what annoyed him so much about the problems between Elendel and the outer cities. Did these people comprehend what life was like out in the Roughs, where planting was fraught with uncertainty, and the danger of starvation was real?

They think people are foolish for living in the Roughs, Wax thought, taking the old-fashioned spyglass that MeLaan handed him. *They don't understand what it's like to get trapped out there for generations, too poor—or too stubborn—to return to the Basin.*

Freedom in the Roughs came at a cost. Either way, the Basin was—literally—paradise, crafted for men by a God who wanted to compensate the world for a millennium of ashes and ruin. It seemed that even in paradise, men would find reasons to squabble and fight.

Wax raised the spyglass. “What am I looking for?”

“Check the road about a mile up,” MeLaan said. “By that creek with the bridge over it.”

He spotted a couple of men lounging in a field with axes. From the looks of it, they’d been cutting at the trunk of a dead tree. Another fallen tree crossed the roadway.

“What do you see?” MeLaan asked.

“A roadblock that doesn’t want to look like one,” Wax said. “That tree across the road is arranged to seem as if it just fell there, but the furrows on the ground indicate it was dragged there intentionally, and has been moved a time or two since being placed.”

“Good eye,” MeLaan said.

“You can’t have it,” he said, turning the spyglass and looking toward the farmsteads in the area. “Soldiers stationed in that farmhouse over there, I’d guess. And none of the other homes have smoke rising from them. Probably abandoned. You’re unlikely to find a farmstead this time of day without dinner in the oven.”

“They’re waiting for us?”

“No, this is too extensive for that,” Wax said. “This is a perimeter. They’re trying not to have it look like one, to prevent word from spreading, but they’ve cordoned off this entire area. What the hell is happening in there?”

MeLaan shook her head, looking baffled.

“Well, we can’t take the coach any farther,” Wax said, handing back the spyglass. “How are you at bareback?”

“Well, I haven’t thrown any riders off recently, but I don’t get occasion to be a horse very often, so I can’t say how I’ll feel today.”

Wax blinked.

“Oh, you meant *riding,*” MeLaan said. “Yeah, I’m fine. I doubt I’m the one you’ll have to worry about.” She nodded back toward Steris walking into the grove, trailed by Wayne, who had filled his hat with walnuts.

“Right,” Wax said.

Hopefully some of their horses would prove docile.

* * *

Twilight settled upon the land fitfully, like a tired eye struggling to stay open. It was the variety of the land down here in the south, Wax figured. One moment you could be riding through a wooded hollow, all in shadow, and the next you’d crest a hill into an open field and find that the sun hadn’t quite dropped below the horizon yet.

Still, darkness did eventually arrive, but with it came no mists. Wax realized he’d been longing to feel them envelop him again.

MeLaan led the sortie, keeping to forested areas when possible. She or Wayne would scout ahead, listening for patrols, but the Set was attempting to hold such a large area that they obviously couldn’t watch the whole wilderness. Marasi, of course, was an accomplished rider—and seemed pleased to have a reason to change into her new constable’s trousers and jacket.

Steris surprised him. She did just fine, even riding in a skirt. She’d packed one full enough that she could tuck it beneath her and ride bareback without exposing too much. She took to it without complaint, as she’d done with practically everything else on this trip.

The few farmsteads or hunter’s camps they passed on their ride were empty. Wax felt a mounting disquiet. Yes, this was a small, largely unpopulated region in the Basin’s backwaters—but it was still profoundly disturbing that the Set could dominate it so fully.

Once they reached the final patch of trees near the village, MeLaan scouted ahead, then came back and waved for him to follow. He crawled up with her to peer at the village from the tree line.

Bright electric floodlights lit the perimeter around an enormous structure in what obviously had once been the center of the village of Dulsing. Wooden, windowless, huge, it was still under construction, judging by the scaffolding at the sides and the unfinished roof at the top. The town's buildings had mostly been torn down, leaving only a few at the perimeter untouched.

The roofless top of the building glowed with a warm light. Where were they getting so much electricity? MeLaan handed him the spyglass and he raised it, inspecting the perimeter. Those were definitely soldiers, wearing red uniforms with some mark on the breast that wasn't distinguishable at this distance. They carried rifles at their shoulders, and the floodlights created a bright ring around the place. Focused outward, not toward the building, which left plenty of shadowed areas inside that ring. So they'd have cover once they got past the perimeter.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Is that some kind of bunker?"

"Doesn't look like any fort *I've* seen," MeLaan whispered. "With those flimsy walls? Looks more like a big warehouse."

A warehouse as large as a small town. Wax shook his head in bafflement, then spotted something near the far side of the village. A waterfall? It was outside the lights, but he thought he could see mist rising from where it plunged down, and a small stream did run through the village.

"High ground that direction," he said.

"Yeah," she said. "The maps mention the waterfall over there. Small but pretty, supposedly."

"Must have hooked a turbine up to it," he said. "That's where the power is coming from. Let's get back to the others."

They crawled through the underbrush again to where Wayne, Marasi, and Steris waited in the dim woods. "They're here all right," Wax whispered. "We have to find a way to get in. Tons of soldiers. Well-guarded perimeter."

"Fly in," Steris suggested.

"Not gonna work," Wayne said. "They had a Seeker back at the party; you think they won't have one here? The moment one of us burns a metal, we'll draw a hundred of Suit's goons to welcome us with a handshake and a friendly bit of murderin'."

"What then?" Marasi asked.

“I need to see,” Wayne said.

“There’s a better vantage on the other side, we think,” Wax said. He pointed, and MeLaan led the way in the darkness, walking her horse between the towering hardwoods. Wax fell in with Steris at the tail of the group, and lagged a little to be able to speak with her privately.

“Steris,” he whispered, “I’ve been considering how to proceed once we decide how to infiltrate. I’ve thought about bringing you in with us, and I just don’t see that it’s feasible. I think it would be best if you stayed and watched the horses.”

“Very well.”

“No, really. Those are *armed soldiers*. I can’t even fathom how I’d feel if I brought you in there and something happened. You need to stay out here.”

“Very well.”

“It isn’t subject to—” Wax hesitated. “Wait. You’re all right with this?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” she asked. “I barely have any sense of where to point a gun, and have hardly any capacity for sneaking—that’s really quite a scandalous talent if you think about it, Lord Waxillium. While I *do* believe that people tend to be safest when near you, riding into an enemy compound is stretching the issue. I’ll stay here.”

Wax grinned in the darkness. “Steris, you’re a gem.”

“What? Because I have a moderately healthy sense of self-preservation?”

“Let’s just say that out in the Roughs, I was accustomed to people always wanting to try things beyond their capacity. And they always seemed determined to do it right when it was the most dangerous.”

“Well, I shall endeavor to stay out of sight,” Steris said, “and not get captured.”

“I doubt you need to worry about that all the way out here.”

“Oh, I agree,” she said. “But that *is* the sort of statistical anomaly that plagues my life, so I’ll plan for it nonetheless.”

With some difficulty, they navigated to the eastern edge of the town, where they left Steris and the horses. Wax dug some supplies off the pack animal. Metal vials, extra bullets, plenty of guns—including the aluminum one he'd stolen back at Kelesina's place. And the last of Ranette's ball-and-string devices, which he tucked into the pouch on his gunbelt.

After climbing up some switchbacks, they were able to settle onto a darkened ridge above the falls—which were nowhere near as impressive as he'd imagined—and study the town. Well, the remnants of it.

"I wish we could see into that building," Marasi said, handing back the spyglass.

Wax grunted in agreement. They were *almost* high enough to see what was going on inside. Certainly, those flickering lights bespoke considerable activity: people moving down below, passing before the lights in the large chamber. But what were they doing, and why were they still at it well into the night?

"Gonna be hard to sneak in there," Wayne said.

"You could kill one of the guards for me," MeLaan said, settling onto a rock. "I'd eat him, take his shape, and slip us in that way."

Wax blinked, then glanced at Marasi, who seemed sick.

"Really," MeLaan said, "you all need to stop staring at me like that when I offer pragmatic suggestions."

"It's not pragmatic," Marasi said. "It's cannibalism."

"Technically it's not, as we're different species. Honestly, if you look at our physiology, I share less in common with humans than you do with a cow—and nobody gasps when you eat one of *those.* You didn't have trouble with it back in the mansion with Innate's bodyguard."

"She was already dead," Wax said. "Thank you for the suggestion, MeLaan, but getting you a guard's body is out of the question."

"We don't like killin' folks," Wayne said. "At least, unless they start shootin' at us. They're just chaps what are doing their job." He looked to Marasi, as if for support.

"Don't look at me," Marasi said. "I'm reeling from watching *you* trying to take the moral high ground."

"Focus, Wayne," Wax said. "How are we going to get in? Shall we try a Fat Belt?"

“Nah,” Wayne said, “too loud. I think we should do Spoiled Tomato.”

“Dangerous,” Wax said, shaking his head. “I’d have to do the placement just right, between the lit perimeter and the shadowed part near the walls.”

“You can do it. You make shots like that all the time. Plus, we got this shiny new metalmind, full o’ health waitin’ to be slurped up.”

“A mistake could ruin the whole infiltration, healing power or no,” Wax said. “I think we should do Duck Under Clouds instead.”

“You kiddin’?” Wayne said. “Didn’t you get *shot* last time we tried that?”

“Kinda,” Wax admitted.

MeLaan stared at them, baffled. “Duck under Clouds?”

“They get like this,” Marasi said, patting her on the shoulder. “Best not to listen too closely.”

“Tube Run,” Wayne said.

“No glue.”

“Banefielder?”

“Too dark.”

“Blackwatch Doublestomp.”

Wax hesitated. “… The hell is that?”

“Just made it up,” Wayne said, grinning. “It’s a nifty code name though, eh?”

“Not bad,” Wax admitted. “And what type of plan is it?”

“Same as Spoiled Tomato,” Wayne said.

“I said that was too dangerous.”

“Nothin’ else will work,” Wayne said, standing. “Look, are we going to sit here arguing, or are we going to do this?”

Wax debated for a moment, eyeing the grounds, thinking. Could he get the placement right?

But then, did he have a better plan? That perimeter was very well guarded, but it was a dark night. If his life in the Roughs had taught him one thing, it was to trust his instincts. Unfortunately, at that moment they agreed with Wayne.

So, before he could talk himself out of it, he pulled his shotgun from its holster and tossed it to Wayne. The shorter man caught it with distaste—guns and Wayne didn't agree. His arms immediately started shaking.

"Try to hold on tight," Wax said. "Make an opening on the north side, if you can."

He increased his weight, flared his metal, and Pushed on the gun, using it as an anchor to hurl Wayne out off the rocky outcropping and over the camp. The man soared from the Push before dropping through the darkness, some fifty feet toward the ground below.

Marasi gasped. "Spoiled Tomato?" she asked.

"Yeah," Wax said. "Apparently it makes a mess sometimes when he lands."

* * *

To rust with that Wax, Wayne thought as he plummeted toward the ground, his hat blowing off. *Tossin' a gun to a fellow without even warnin' him. Why, that's just*—

He hit.

Now, there was a trick to falling to your death. Bodies hitting the ground were *loud*. Louder than anyone ever expected.

He mitigated this by hitting feet-first—his legs both snapped immediately—then twisted onto his side, breaking his shoulder, but dampening some of the sound by rolling with the impact. He tapped his fancy new metalmind right before his head smacked the ground, dazing him.

He ended up in a crumpled, broken heap beside a pile of rocks. *Of course* Wax would have sent him into a pile of rocks. As his vision cleared, he tried to glance at his legs, but he couldn't move. Couldn't feel anything, actually, which was quite pleasant. It was always nice when you snapped the spine—helped with the pain.

Not that the pain went *completely* away, mind you. But he and pain were old friends what shared a handshake and a beer now and then. Didn't much like one another, but they had a working relationship. Sensation—and agony

—flooded back into him as his metalmind healed his spine, focusing on the worst wounds first. He drew in a deep breath. A snapped spine could suffocate a man. People didn't know that. Or, well, the ones who *did* know had suffocated already.

As soon as he could move—even while his legs were healing—he twisted and used his good arm to position one of the large rocks in the pile. Looked like these stones were here intended for shoring up the sides of the stream, perhaps to make a pathway across. Wayne put them to good use, reaching up with his other hand as his shoulder healed. Wax had placed him well, right in the dark area between the perimeter watchposts and the building. But that didn't mean he was safe.

Wayne stumbled to his feet, dragging Wax's gun, his leg twisting about and bones reknitting. Damn fine metalmind, that gold bracelet was. An extensive healing like this would have cost him months of saving up, but this metalmind was still mostly full.

He stumbled away as quietly as he could, leaving a large rock balanced on the others as he sought a place deeper in the shadows, then hid the gun near the building so his damn hand would stop shaking.

He got away none too soon. A pair of soldiers were approaching from the perimeter.

"It was over here," one said to the other. As they drew closer, one of the spotlights turned around and shone on the area, giving them light and quite nearly exposing Wayne. He froze in the shadows near a pile of work equipment, sweating as his toes popped softly, the bones grinding against one another as they knit back into their proper places.

The guards didn't hear. They stepped up to where he'd fallen—no tomato splat of blood this time, fortunately—and looked around. One nudged the stone accidentally, and it fell off the peak where Wayne had placed it, rolling down the side of the small pile and clattering against the other rocks. The men looked at it, then nodded, doing a quick sweep but heading back to their post and returning the light to its scan of the nearby area. The noise they'd heard had merely been some rocks shifting. Nothing significant.

Wayne stood up straight in the darkness and stopped tapping the bracelet metalmind. He felt good. Renewed, like he always did after a big healing. Felt like he could do something impossible, run up a mountain, or eat the entire boar and chips plate at Findley's all on his own.

He crept off through the shadows, about important business. Fortunately, he found his hat almost immediately, near another rock pile. That done, he moved on to less important matters, like making an opportunity to help the others sneak in.

Wax had said north side. *Let's see.…* He kept close to the building, and even resisted the urge to go sneaking in on his own to find out what in Ruin's name was in there.

Time to think like a guard. It was hard, as he didn't have a guard's hat. He settled into the shadows and listened as a pair of them passed on patrol, digesting their accents like a nice snack of pretzel sticks with mustard.

After about fifteen minutes of watching, he picked out a likely candidate and kept pace as the man did his rounds, though Wayne stayed in the shadow. The lanky fellow had a face like a rabbit, but was tall enough he could probably have picked all the walnuts he wanted without needing a stepladder.

Here I am, Wayne thought, *in the middle of nowhere! Guarding a big old barn. This isn't what I signed up for. I haven't seen my daughter in eight months. Eight months! She's probably talking by now. Rusts. This life.*

The man turned to go back the other way on his rounds, and someone barked out at him from one of the stations with the floodlights, saying something Wayne couldn't hear. The tone was unmistakable.

And my superiors, Wayne thought, turning and slinking along in the shadows, still keeping pace with the man. *Oh, how they lean on me! Every little thing gets me a talking-to. Shouting. That's all this life is. Being yelled at day in and day out.*

Wayne smiled, then scuttled ahead of the man, looking for something he'd stepped over earlier. A set of black cords, each as thick as his finger, plugged into a big box near the building. As the guard came strolling past, not paying much attention, Wayne carefully lifted the cords.

The guard's foot caught on them. In that moment, Wayne yanked them from the hub.

The floodlights nearest to him went out.

Men immediately started shouting. The guard panicked in the darkness. "I'm sorry!" he shouted. "I didn't mean to. I wasn't watching my feet!"

Wayne slipped away and found a nice quiet nook between two stacks of sandbags as the guards shouted and argued, and the poor man was chewed out. Some people came in to fix the cords, though Wayne had tossed them to the side, so it took some time searching in the dark to find the ends and get them connected.

The lights came back on. Wayne was taking a long swig from his leather canteen as Wax, Marasi, and MeLaan joined him in the shadows. "Nice," Wax whispered.

"It wasn't, actually," Wayne whispered. "It was pretty mean. That poor guard ain't done nothin' wrong, and everybody keeps yellin' at him."

Wax took the lead at that point, prowling along the side of the big barnlike building. The roof wasn't the only thing still unfinished—the entrances were open, not fitted with proper doors. They stopped beside one and Wayne pointed, whispering to Wax where his shotgun was.

Wax fetched it, then snuck through the doorway. They followed, Wayne last of all. The cavernous interior was lit by a few electric lanterns here and there, and they passed a long light lattice that was obviously going to be installed in the ceiling, once the roof was done. It was brighter than outside in here, but not by much, and there were stacks of boxes and supplies arranged in rows, which let them sneak through and stay hidden. Once they got to the front of the rows of boxes, Wax hesitated, and the two women peered around him. Nobody gave Wayne a good view, which was how it always went. First he got yelled at on the job, then this.

He wiggled between them, getting a good elbow into Marasi's midriff—which earned him a glare, as if she didn't know that proper crowd-wiggling protocol involved getting friendly with one another’s extremities. He managed to peek between Wax and MeLaan, finally getting a glimpse at what had stopped them.

It was a boat.

Of course, the common word “boat” didn’t do the thing justice. Wayne stared at the massive construction, searching for a better description. One that would capture the majesty, the incredible scale, of the thing he was seeing.

“That’s a *damn big boat*,” he finally whispered.

Much better.

Why would they be building a ship here, miles and miles from the ocean? The thing couldn’t be easy to move. It filled almost the entire building, with a curved bottom and a prow—unfinished on one side—that was easily three stories high. The thing had two long, armlike extensions at the sides. Pontoons? They were big, and one wasn’t finished yet, ending in a jagged line of construction.

Jagged? Wayne frowned. That didn’t look like the way you built something. In fact, now that he studied it, that prow looked more *crumpled* than *unfinished*.

“Someone broke it,” Wayne said, pointing. “They were trying to move it, and cracked off one pontoon.”

“It has to be a warship,” Marasi said. “They *are* preparing for a war.”

“I think Wayne is right,” Wax said. “Look at the gouges in the dirt, the damage to the hull. They were transporting this thing through here, and it rolled free and cracked. So the Set constructed this building to cut it off from the view of anyone outside while they repair it.”

“Engineers,” Wayne said, pointing at some people who were *obviously* smart types, walking along the outside of the ship and pointing, carrying clipboards and wearing dark brown suits and skirts. The type teachers at schools would wear, thinking they were the height of fashion.

“It’s not like any ship I’ve seen,” Marasi said, shouldering her purse and clutching her rifle.

“You brought your purse,” Wayne said, “on a darin’ infiltration?”

“Why not?” she said. “Purses are handy. Anyway, if the Set has technology like that speaking telegraph, what will they put on a ship like this? And why did they build it away from the sea in the first place?”

“Suit will have answers,” Wax said, eyes narrowing. “Marasi, I assume you’re still after the spike?”

“Yes,” she said, determined.

“I’m going to find my uncle. Who do you want? Wayne or MeLaan?”

“MeLaan this time,” Marasi said.

Wax nodded. “Stay hidden, but if Wayne and I get spotted, try to help. We’ll do the same for you. If you find that spike, return to this point and lie low. If all goes well, we’ll slip back out together.”

“And if all doesn’t go well?”

“Which it won’t,” Wayne added.

“Meet back where we left Steris and the horses,” Wax said, sliding a gun from the holster at his side. MeLaan did the same, only her holster was her *leg*. Like, the skin split and she reached in through a slit in her trousers and slipped the gun out—a sleek, long-barreled thing.

Wayne whistled softly. She grinned, then gave him a kiss. “Try not to get shot too many times.”

“You neither,” he said.

They split up.

18

Marasi snuck through the warehouse, her rifle’s strap an uncomfortable weight on her shoulder. She was glad for the trousers—they were quieter than rustling skirts—but she kept worrying that the scientists and workers in the room would notice the sound of her boots on the packed earth.

Probably not. The warehouse was hardly silent. Though it was night, and activity was muted, some people were still working. Along one side of the room, a few carpenters sawed lengths of wood, each stroke echoing back from the walls. The group of engineers made exclamations as they discussed aspects of the large vessel.

They seem surprised by it, Marasi thought. *As if they’re not the ones who built it in the first place.* Were they new to the project, then?

Guards dotted the warehouse, but there weren’t nearly as many as outside. She and MeLaan kept to the shadowed edge of the chamber, near the piles of boxes and supplies, but still had to pass uncomfortably close to a group of soldiers sitting at a small table playing cards.

The soldiers didn’t notice them. Eventually, MeLaan and Marasi managed to reach the south wall, which was one of the long sides of the rectangular building. Here, rooms had been built into the structure, and they were more finished than the rest, complete with doors and the occasional window.

“Living quarters?” Marasi whispered, pointing.

“Maybe,” MeLaan replied, crouching beside her. “So how are we going to find the spike?”

“I’d assume it’s inside a safe of some sort.”

“Maybe,” MeLaan said. “Or it could be in a desk drawer in one of those rooms, or packed away in a box … or hell, they may have just thrown it away. Suit only seemed to want it because he required proof that poor ReLuur had been dealt with.”

Marasi took a deep breath. “If that’s the case, we’ll have to interrogate Suit once Waxillium finds him. But I don’t think they threw it away. We know the Set is researching ways to make Allomancers, and we know they’re interested in Hemalurgy. They’d study the spike instead of tossing it.”

MeLaan nodded thoughtfully. “But it could still be practically anywhere.”

Not far away, the scientists—led by a man with a limp—walked up a plank ramp, peering into the open side of the boat. *It’s him,* Marasi thought. The same one from the train robbery. He was showing the newcomers around the project.

They stepped inside.

“I’ve got an idea,” Marasi said.

“How crazy is it?”

“Less crazy than tossing Wayne off a cliff.”

“Not a high bar, but all right. How do we start?”

Marasi pointed at the hole in the hull that the scientists had entered through. “We get in there.”

* * *

Wax moved along behind the supply pallets in the direction opposite Marasi’s, feeling as if he were stepping through the shadow of progress. He’d pondered the transformations that Elendel had undergone during his absence: motorcars and electric lights, skyscrapers and concrete roads. It was like he'd left one world and come back to another.

That seemed only the beginning. Enormous warships. Technology that enhanced Allomancy. Bracers that one Feruchemist could fill, and another could use. He couldn't help but feel intimidated, as if this behemoth ship were a soldier from another time, come to stamp out all the dusty old relics like Wax.

He pulled up beside the last stack of planks in the line, Wayne joining him. The man yanked out his canteen, which was of sturdy, stiff leather, worked to the shape of a small bottle. He took a swig and offered it to Wax, who accepted it and downed a drink.

He coughed softly. “Apple juice?”

“Good for the body,” Wayne said, tucking the canteen away.

“I was not expecting that.”

“Gotta keep the stomach guessin', mate,” Wayne said. “Or it'll grow complacent and all. How're we gonna find your uncle?”

“Perspective?” Wax asked, nodding toward the middle reaches of the warehouse, where a complex network of temporary construction catwalks ringed the inside of the building. They were unpopulated in the night. “We'd have a view of the entire area, but wouldn't be too noticeable from below.”

“Sounds good,” Wayne said. “You up for it, though? You're gonna have to climb up like a regular person. No Steelpushes.”

He didn't have any metal inside of him—too easy to use reflexively. His vials sat unused on his belt.

“I'll be fine,” Wax said dryly. He waited until nearby guards and workers had passed, then led the way in a low run along the shadows of the building. The lights were aimed on the ship, away from the walls. He had to hope that the few workers walking about weren't focused on the dark reaches of the large chamber.

Two full-sized catwalks ran the length of the wall up high, and leading toward them were a series of ladders and shorter catwalks as landings, to hold supplies. He grabbed the bottom ladder and climbed up one level, then another. By the third one, his arms were aching. He made himself lighter, which helped, but he still had to stop and catch his breath on the fifth tier. Just as making his body heavier granted him the strength to move his oversized muscles, getting lighter always seemed to cost him some of his strength.

“Gettin’ old,” Wayne said with a grin, passing him and starting up the next ladder.

“Don’t be dense,” Wax said, grabbing the ladder below him and climbing. “I’m trying to pace myself. What if we reach the top and have to fight?”

“You can throw your wooden teeth at ’em,” Wayne said from above. “Do some cane waggin’ as well. I’m sure you’re cross about stayin’ up so late.”

Wax growled softly and climbed up onto the next tier, but in fact he was winded to the point that arguing was taxing. The younger man seemed to realize it, and had a wide grin on his face as they climbed up the final two tiers to the bottom catwalk.

“I should deck you right in your grin,” he grumbled as he joined the still-smiling Wayne on the catwalk. “But you’d just heal.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I’d fall over and groan. Considerin’ your age, it’s more important to make you feel you’ve accomplished somethin’ in a day.”

Wax shook his head, turning and stepping to the side along the catwalk. The board under his foot immediately cracked. His leg slipped through, and though he caught himself and yanked the foot out, for the first time in ages he felt a little of what others must feel at being up so high. That ground was far, far below, and he didn’t have any metals in him at the moment.

He growled and stepped around the hole. “That was *not* my fault. The board was weak.”

“Sure, sure,” Wayne said. “It’s okay, mate. Most folks put on a little weight as they hit their twilight years. ’S natural and all.”

“If I shot you,” Wax said, “nobody would blame me. They’d probably just say, ‘Wow. You lasted that long? I’d have shot him years ago.’ Then they’d buy me a pint.”

“Now, that hurts, it does,” Wayne said. “I—”

“Who are *you*?”

Wax froze, then both he and Wayne looked upward toward the person leaning out over the railing of the upper catwalk, staring down at them. An engineer, by the looks of it, in a white coat over vest and cravat. He frowned at them, then seemed to recognize Wax, his eyes widening.

“Rust,” Wax swore, raising his hands as Wayne moved immediately, jumping up. Wax gave him a boost, and he kicked off and grabbed the railing of the upper catwalk. The engineer started to cry out, but Wayne snatched the man’s ankle, toppling him with a thump.

Wayne swung up in a heartbeat, and another thump sounded. Wax waited, nervous. Moments passed.

“Wayne?” he hissed. “Are you up there?”

A moment later, the engineer’s unconscious face appeared over the side of the catwalk, eyes closed.

“Of course he’s up here,” Wayne said from up above, imitating the voice of the unfortunate engineer and wiggling the head like a puppet’s. “You just tossed that bloke up here, mate! You’ve forgotten already? Memory loss. You must be gettin’ *real* old.”

* * *

Technically, every person in the world was dying—they were merely doing it very slowly. Irich’s curse was not that he was dying. It was that he could *feel* it happening.

As he shuffled down the hallways of the enormous wooden ship, he had to keep close watch on the floor, because the slightest dip or cleft could cause him to trip. When he gestured toward the wall where they’d found the burned maps—explaining to the other scientists—his arm felt as if it were strapped with a ten-pound weight.

His left hand barely worked anymore; he could grip his cane, but he couldn’t stop his hand from trembling as he did so—and he practically had to drag his left leg with each step. The shortness of breath had begun. His physician said that one day, he simply wouldn’t have the strength to breathe.

On that day, Irich would suffocate alone, unable to move. And he could feel it coming. Step by excruciating step.

“And what is this, Professor Irich?” Stanoux asked, gesturing toward the ceiling. “Such a fascinating pattern!”

“We aren’t certain,” Irich said, leaning on his cane and looking upward—a task that was surprisingly difficult. Rusts. He hadn’t had trouble tipping his head back before, had he?

Step by step.

“It looks like a ship,” Stansi said, cocking her head.

Indeed, the golden pattern on the corridor ceiling *did* look something like a small ship. Why paint it here? He suspected it would take years to sort out this vessel’s many secrets. Once, Irich would have been content to spend his entire life picking through these oddities, writing about each and every one.

Today however, his “entire life” seemed far too short a period to be spent on such endeavors. Suit and Sequence wanted their weapons, and they could have them, for Irich desired only one thing.

A miracle.

“Please, continue with me,” Irich said, walking down the corridor with his latest gait. He had to develop a new one every few months, as more of his muscles grew too weak or refused to function. Step, cane, shuffle, breathe. Step, cane, shuffle, breathe.

“What marvelous woodwork!” Stanoux said, adjusting his spectacles. “Aunt, do you recognize what kind of wood this is?”

Stansi stepped up beside him, waving over the guard with the lantern so she could admire the strange hardwood. Irich had shown similar interest in the ship’s details at first, but each day his patience grew more strained.

“Please,” Irich said. “You shall have all the time you wish to study, prod, and theorize. But only *after* we have solved the primary problem.”

“Which is?” Stansi asked.

Irich gestured toward an arched doorway ahead, guarded by a soldier with another lantern. She saluted as Irich passed. Technically, he was an Array—a rank of some influence within the Set. Suit and his people had a high regard for scientific thought. The power and prestige, however, were meaningless to him. Neither could grant him additional breaths of life.

Past the doorway, he waved for his group of five scientists to gaze upon the grand machinery that filled the hold of the strange vessel. It was like nothing he had ever seen, without gears or wires. It looked more like a *hearth*, only constructed of a lightweight metal with lines of other metals running away from it along the walls. Like a spiderweb.

“This ship,” Irich said, “is filled with enigmas. You have noticed the odd patterns on the ceilings, but questions like those are barely the *beginning*. What is the purpose of the room hung with dozens of black hoods, like those worn by an executioner? We have found what appear to be musical instruments, but they seem incapable of making any sounds. The ship has an ingenious system of plumbing, and we have identified facilities for both men and women—but there is a *third* set of rooms with an indecipherable marking on the doors. For whom were these built? People of the lower class? Families? A *third* gender? So many questions.

“One question tops them all, and we feel that answering it will provide the very linchpin. It is why I have called for you, the most brilliant minds of the outer cities. If you can answer this, we will gain the technological might to secure our freedom from Elendel oppression once and for all.”

“And what question might that be?” Professor Javie asked.

Irich turned back to them. “Why, how this thing *moves* of course.”

“You don’t know?”

Irich shook his head. “It defies all scientific knowledge available to us. Some mechanisms were undoubtedly damaged in the crash, but as you can see, the vehicle is mostly intact. We *should* have been able to ascertain its method of propulsion, but so far it eludes us.”

“What of the navigators?” Stanoux asked. “The crew? Did none survive?”

“They have been uncooperative,” Irich said. *And somewhat fragile.* “Beyond that, the language barrier has so far proven insurmountable. That is why I invited you, Lord Stanoux, as one of the world’s foremost experts on ancient, anteverdant languages. Perhaps you can decipher the books found on this ship. Lady Stansi, you and Professor Javie will lead our engineers. Imagine the power we would have with a fleet of such ships. We would dominate the Basin!”

The scientists shared looks. “I don’t know that I want *any* group having access to such power, Professor,” Lady Stansi said.

Ah, right. These were not politicians. He should not employ the same rhetoric he had used when Suit sent him to gather funds from the wealthy. “Yes,” he admitted, “it will be a terrible burden. But surely you can see that this knowledge is better off in our hands, rather than in the hands of those at Elendel? And think of what we will *learn*, what we could *know*.”

They took that better, nodding in turn. He would have to speak with Suit—these people must not see themselves as serving a totalitarian army, but a benign freedom movement seeking knowledge and peace. That would be difficult, with all these rusted soldiers marching about and saluting everyone.

He prepared for an explanation of what they knew, intending to divert the scientists with promises of knowledge, when he heard a voice echo down the hallway. “Professor Irich?”

He sighed. What now? “Excuse me,” he said. “Lady Stansi, perhaps you will wish to inspect this fixture, which appears to provide some kind of power to the ship. It does not have electricity, so far as we can discern. I would value your unbiased opinions before I tell you what we have concluded. I must go deal with something.”

They seemed amenable to this—enthusiastic even. He left them and limped down the hallway. *Too slow, too slow,* he thought, both of his walk and the possibility of progress from the scientists. He couldn’t wait upon research, experimentation. He needed answers *now*. He had thought that on the train, they might find …

But no, of course not. An idle hope. He should never have left this project. Back in the hallway, he found no sign of the person who had called to him. Frustrated, he made it all the way back to the doorway before turning and searching down one of the side hallways. They should know better than to call for him! Could they not see the difficulty he had in traversing even a short distance?

He started back up the hallway, but hesitated as he noticed a small storage compartment that had popped open on the wall. There were hundreds of these scattered throughout the ship, containing ropes or weapons or other items. But this one had dropped something to the floor. A small, silvery cube.

His heart leaped in excitement. Another of the devices? Such luck! He had thought all these compartments searched by now. He struggled to pick it up, going down on his good knee and fishing for it, then lurched back to his feet.

A plan was already forming. He would tell Suit that it had been recovered by one of his spies in New Seran. His punishments would be lifted, and perhaps he would be allowed to move to the second site, perhaps join the expedition.

Excited, he sent a soldier to watch the scientists, then hobbled out of the ship, glad that something was finally going *right* for him.

* * *

Marasi cracked a closet door within the strange ship, then looked after the man called Irich, who limped through the gaping hole in the wall. MeLaan slipped out of a closet across the hallway from her and held up a warding hand to Marasi, then snuck to the opening to watch where Irich went.

Marasi waited, anxious. Though her duties as a constable usually related more to analysis and investigation, she'd gone on her share of raids in Elendel. She'd thought herself hardened, but *Harmony,* this mission was starting to rub her nerves raw. Too little sleep, and so much sneaking about, hiding, knowing that at any moment someone could turn a corner and find you there, looking guilty as sin.

MeLaan finally waved her forward, and she scrambled out of the closet and knelt beside the kandra at the entrance.

“He went into that room,” MeLaan said, pointing at a door along the wall. “Now what?”

“We wait just a bit longer,” Marasi said. “And see if he comes back out.”

* * *

Wax prowled along the wooden planks of the interior scaffolding. MeLaan’s spyglass let him get a good look at the ground floor, though he’d have much preferred binoculars. He scanned the whole area, noticing with interest as Marasi and MeLaan entered the ship.

That ship … something about it bothered him. He hadn’t been on many boats, but the decks atop the enormous thing seemed off to him. Where were the masts? He’d assumed them torn down, but from above, he could see no broken stumps. So, was this ship propelled through the water by a steam engine, perhaps? Gasoline?

After rounding the entire building on the catwalk, he saw no sign of his uncle.

“Still nothing?” Wayne asked as he lowered the spyglass a last time.

Wax shook his head. “There are some rooms built into the north side of the structure. He could be in there. He might also be inside the ship.”

“So what do we try next?”

Wax tapped the end of the spyglass against his palm. He’d been struggling with the same question. How did he find his prey without alerting the guards camped outside?

Wayne nudged him. Down below, the limping man came back out of the boat. Wax focused the spyglass on him, watching as he crossed to one of the nearby rooms.

“Did he look anxious about somethin’ to you?” Wayne asked.

“Yeah,” Wax said, lowering the spyglass. “What did those two women *do* in there?”

“Maybe they—”

“I don’t want to hear your guess,” Wax said. “Really.”

“Fair enough.”

“Come on,” Wax said, leading the way back around the shadowed catwalks toward the ladders.

“You have an idea?” Wayne asked.

“More of an impression,” Wax said. “Suit doesn’t like talking to minions. Everyone we’ve interviewed indicates the same thing—he chooses underlings with some power and repute and lets them handle things. Miles, the Marksman. My uncle loathes being bothered.”

“So…”

“That man with the limp,” Wax said, “probably has a similar role here. He’s an Allomancer, and I heard him referenced in Lady Kelesina’s mansion; he’s an important underling, though perhaps not in favor right now. Either way, he likely reports directly to my uncle.”

“So follow him long enough…” Wayne said.

“… and we should find Suit.”

“Sounds good,” Wayne said. “Unless he reports every afternoon at tea, which would have us waitin’ a *long* time.”

Wax paused by the ladder, noticing with surprise that the man with the limp had already left the rooms. Wax’s view was partially obscured by the massive ship, but he did catch sight of the man hobbling around the front of the vessel, again walking with a determined air.

Wax held up a hand to Wayne, then crouched down with the spyglass. The limping man crossed the warehouse to a solitary room, much like a guard chamber, built into the southwest corner. A soldier here stepped aside, letting the limping man enter. As the door swung open, Wax got a good glimpse of the room beyond.

His sister was inside.

He almost dropped the spyglass. The door swung shut, so he couldn’t get a second glimpse, but he *had* seen her. Sitting at a small table, loomed over by the large Coinshot brute Wax had fought on the train.

“Wax?” Wayne asked.

“It’s Telsin,” Wax whispered. “She’s being held inside that room.” He found himself rising and reaching for one of his metal vials.

“Whoa, *whoa*, mate,” Wayne said, grabbing his arm. “I’m all for charging in recklessly and whatnot, but don’t you think it would be best to talk this through? You know, before we get all ‘Let’s shoot this place up.’”

“She’s *here*, Wayne,” he said. “This is why I came.” He felt cold. “She’ll know things about our uncle. She’s the key. I’m going in after her.”

“All right, all right,” Wayne said. “But Wax, doesn’t it strike you as worryish that *I’m* havin’ to be the voice of reason here?”

Wax looked down at his friend. “It probably should.”

“Yeah, I’ll say. Look, I’ve got an idea.”

“How bad an idea is it?”

“Compared to burnin’ Allomancy, going in shooting, and inevitably drawing the attention of all those guards, not to mention the Set’s kill squads? I’d say compared to that, it’s a pretty *damn* good idea.”

“Tell me.”

“Well, see,” Wayne said, sticking his gum to one of the catwalk’s support beams, “we’ve got this *very* nice engineer’s outfit over there on the unconscious fellow, and ever since that party half a year back, I been workin’ on my smart-person talk.…”

19

Marasi waited inside the ship, forcing herself—with effort—to remain calm. How did Waxillium do it? He and Wayne could be so relaxed, it seemed like they could take a nap in the middle of a firefight.

Well, she stood her ground—or rather, knelt it—and was rewarded. Through the hole in the ship's hull, she watched the wall of the warehouse where the rooms were. Irich soon hobbled out of one, then shuffled off and called toward some guards.

"What was that he said?" Marasi asked.

"He told them to 'Send to Mister Suit,'" MeLaan said. "You think he really stashed that device in the same place as they're keeping the spike?"

"That's the hope," Marasi said.

"Shall we?"

Marasi nodded, then prepared herself for another nerve-racking experience. MeLaan led, strolling down the planks and out into the open. Marasi followed, keeping her head high as MeLaan had told her. *Look like you belong,* the kandra had said. *The first rule of impersonation is to* belong.

She felt completely exposed, as if she were dancing naked in the middle of Elendel's Hub. They reached the bottom of the gangway, walking with excruciating slowness, and crossed the floor of the warehouse to the door. Was Marasi walking too stiffly? She couldn't check over her shoulder—MeLaan had warned her about that. But surely a quick glance wouldn't hurt anything.…

Stay firm. MeLaan tried the door, and blessedly it opened. The two of them stepped through into an empty hallway, and Marasi shut the door. No shouts of alarm followed. She was positive one of the carpenters had glanced at them, but nobody had said a word.

"Nice work," MeLaan said.

"I feel like I'm going to puke."

"Must run in the family," MeLaan said, leading her along the hallway. It had bare wooden walls and smelled of sawdust, and a solitary electric light hung from the ceiling. Melaan stopped at the simple door at the end, listened carefully, then tried the knob. This one was locked.

"You can open it?" Marasi said. "Like you did before?"

"Sure," MeLaan said, kneeling by the doorknob. "No problem. I'll try something more mundane first." She cocked her hand, and a set of picks *sprouted* from the skin of her forearm. She plucked them free and started working on the door.

"Handy," Marasi said.

"Pun intended?"

"That depends," she said, checking over her shoulder. The hallway was still empty. *Fool girl.* "How many times have you heard that joke?"

MeLaan smiled, focused on her lockpicking. "I've been alive pushing seven hundred years now, kid. You'll have trouble finding jokes I *haven't* heard."

"You know, I should really interview you sometime."

MeLaan cocked an eyebrow in her direction.

"You kandra have a unique perspective on society," Marasi explained softly. "You've seen trends, movements across large scales."

“I suppose,” MeLaan said, twisting her lockpick. “What good does it do?”

“Statistics show that if we make subtle changes to our environment—the way we approach our legal system, or employment rates, maybe even our city layout—we can positively influence the people living in that environment. Your head may hold the key to what those changes should be! You’ve seen society evolve, move; you’ve watched the shifting of peoples like the tides on a beach.”

“My thigh,” MeLaan said, twisting the doorknob with a click, then pushing the door open a crack. She nodded, standing up straight.

“Your … what?” Marasi asked.

“You said my head might hold the key,” MeLaan said, striding into the chamber beyond—a small, surprisingly well-furnished room. “It’s actually my thigh, right now. A kandra stores its cognitive system through its entire body, but my memories right now are in a solid metal compartment in my thigh. Safer that way. People aim for the head.”

“So what’s in your head?”

“Eyes, sensory apparatus,” MeLaan said. “And an emergency canteen.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope,” MeLaan said, hands on hips, scanning the room. Another door on the left led farther into the system of rooms built along the side of the warehouse, but there were no windows out to the main chamber, which was good.

Though the room smelled of new sawdust, like the rest of the building, here that was mixed with a scent of wood polish and a faint odor of cigar smoke. Light from a small electric desk lamp revealed a tidy study, with rows of books in a bookcase, two plush chairs with a maroon and yellow pattern in front of the desk, and several decorative plants that probably had to be rotated outside each day to keep from wilting.

Marasi trailed through the room, noting its oddities. Every room had them—marks of individuality, clues to the life of the occupant. The desk drawers had wide, exaggerated handles on them. The stand lamp in the corner had been bolted to the wooden floor, as had the chairs, likely to keep them in place should Irich stumble into them. Marasi was not familiar with the man's disease, but it appeared he liked his chambers to accommodate a little fumbling.

MeLaan went straight for the bookcase, then began pulling books off, toppling them to the ground. "It's always behind the books," she said. "People don't like to read, they like to be seen as someone who reads. I—"

"MeLaan?" Marasi said, then pointed to the large safe in the corner.

"Ah," MeLaan said, mid-ransack. She knocked the last few books off the shelf, perhaps for completeness's sake, then strode to the safe. "Hmm … This is going to be a little tougher. Can't crack something like this with a set of picks."

"Can you manage it?" Marasi asked.

"Patience," MeLaan said. "Bring over that lamp."

Marasi took it from the desk, stretching out the cord to its fullest and directing its light for MeLaan.

"Hmmm…" MeLaan said, then pressed her hand against the safe, ignoring the dial. Her fingers and palm went translucent, and then her flesh began to *wiggle,* squeezing into the joints, leaving behind crystalline bones held together with the barest of sinew.

Marasi swallowed, mouth suddenly tasting bitter. She'd known MeLaan could do this, but watching it was something else. She busied herself propping the lamp on the arm of the desk chair to give MeLaan light, though the kandra now knelt with eyes closed, so who knew if she needed it any longer? Marasi then started rummaging through the desk drawers to see if she could find anything important.

Harmony send that Irich goes back to the scientists after this, Marasi thought, *instead of returning here to catch up on paperwork.*

"The world back then," MeLaan said suddenly, "wasn't all that different from the one now."

Marasi hesitated. MeLaan still knelt with her eyes closed, her strange bones exposed. The flesh had gone translucent all the way up to her elbow.

“What do you mean?” Marasi asked.

“People talk about that time,” MeLaan said. “The time of the Lord Mistborn, right after the Catacendre. They speak of it in hushed tones as if it were some time of legends.”

“It was,” Marasi said. “The Counselor of Gods, Hammond, Allrianne Ladrian. They forged a new world.”

“Yeah, sure,” MeLaan said. “But they also squabbled like children, and each one had their own vision of what this ‘new world’ should be. Half the reason you’re having troubles now was because they didn’t care about settlements outside of Elendel. The Originators were big-city people, through and through. You want trends? Want to know what I’ve seen? People are people. Hell, even *kandra* act the same, in our own way. Life then was like life now, only you have better street food.”

Marasi pondered this, then turned back to the desk. She’d still want to interview some kandra—but perhaps ones who were a little more … reflective than MeLaan.

In the desk, she found a notebook with some of Irich’s observations and sketches about the ship, written in a shaky scrawl, along with a map of the area. The more she discovered, the more certain she was that the Set *hadn’t* built this vessel. They were studying it as much as repairing it.

Marasi tucked the book into her purse. *See, handy,* she thought. After that, she rose to check the other door out of the room. She wouldn’t want to have some random carpenter wander in. She cracked it open and peeked into a completely dark room, and was immediately hit with a pungent odor like that of the slums. Unwashed bodies, dirt and grime. Frowning, she opened the door wider.

The shaded illumination of the lamp—which faced the wrong way to give direct light—crept hesitantly into the room. Shadows stretched long from a few bare tables and a stack of boxes. And beyond them … were those *cages*? Yes. Perhaps four feet tall, with thick bars, the cages looked like the type you might use to contain a large animal.

They were empty. “MeLaan?” Marasi asked, glancing at the kandra—who did not respond. She looked utterly absorbed by her task.

Marasi inched into the room, wishing for another light. What did they keep in here? Guard dogs? She hadn’t seen any of those at the perimeter. She stopped near one of the three large cages, bending over to see if she could determine what kind of animal had been kept in it.

Something rustled in the next cage over. Marasi’s breath caught. What she’d mistaken for a lump of blankets or pillows was *moving*. She glanced toward the desk in the other room, where she’d set her rifle.

The thing lurched and slammed against the bars.

Marasi gasped, jumping away, her back crashing against the stack of nearby boxes. Inside the cage, dim light reflected from a too-flat face of red and black. Dark pits of eyes.

The pictures. Marasi had forgotten the pictures that ReLuur had left. Horrible faces of red and black, with those deep, dark eyes. Images as if from a nightmare, drawn in frantic, scribbled strokes.

The monsters were real. And there was one in the cage here, swathed in thick fur, face of polished red. It regarded her, silent, then reached out between the bars with a shockingly human hand and whispered a single word through lips that somehow didn’t move.

“Please.”

* * *

Wayne turned down his saunter and added a fair measure of scramble to his step instead. This engineer, he didn’t like being here, among all these soldiers. He’d spent his life building houses and working on skyscrapers, and now here he was, basically in the middle of a bivouac!

That ship *was* marvelous, but he had a distinct worry. It was secret. And secret projects were the kind where little men like himself disappeared when everything was finished.

No, something’s wrong, Wayne thought, halfway across the floor of the warehouse. He didn’t stop walking, but he turned his steps in a little circle, like he was pacing. Something was wrong, but what *was* it?

"Wayne?" Wax hissed from the shadows nearby, crouched beside a barrel of pitch.

Wayne ignored him, continuing his loop. He … he was a scientist. No, no, an engineer. He was a working man. Learned enough, but not some fancy professor who was paid to stand all day and talk. He built things, and he hated being in this place, with all its guns. He encouraged life, and the soldiers were the opposite of that. They, they …

No, he thought again, raising hands to the sides of his head. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Shape up, Wayne. This was your *plan. You've gotta make it work.*

What was wrong? He … He was a …

He stopped. Then reached into the pocket of his vest and took out a charcoal pencil. He held it up, inspecting it, before slipping it behind his ear. He let out a long sigh.

He was an engineer. A no-nonsense man who saw that things got done. He liked it here, as they had a military way about them—they said what they wanted, and were straight with him. Men were rewarded for hard work.

He didn't like all those guns. And he certainly didn't like the men in charge of this place. There was something *off* about them. But he held his tongue.

Relaxing, Wayne crossed the rest of the way to the door guard. False nose, mustache, a little extra air in the cheeks to fatten his face, and a perpetual squint in the right eye. Came from looking at plans all the time, he figured. But he didn't need a monocle. Those things looked downright stupid.

He stepped up to the guard. "The lattice supports of the apricity are completely liminal!"

The man blinked at him.

"Don't just stand there!" Wayne said, waving toward the walls of the warehouse. "Can't you see that the forebode malefactors are starting to bow? We could have a full-blown bannock on our hands at any minute!"

“What…” the guard said. “What am *I* supposed to—”

“Please,” Wayne said, pushing him aside—the man let him—and pulling open the door.

The scene beyond was as Wax had described it. That was Telsin, all right. Dark hair, rugged body. Almost like a Roughs woman. He’d seen her evanotypes all over the mansion. Looked older now. Being a prisoner could do that to somebody.

Tweaked-leg and thick-neck stood beside her table, and both turned with annoyance toward him.

Now, Wayne thought, focusing on tweaked-leg, *the real test.*

“We’ve got a serious problem,” Wayne said. “I’ve been checking the integrity of the structure, and the caronals are completely nepheligenous out there! We are about to have a full-blown case of ximelolagnia if somebody doesn’t do something.”

The bespectacled man looked at Wayne, blinked once, then said, “Well, of course we will, you idiot. But what do we *do* about it?”

Wayne held back a smile, tucking it into his pocket for later use. It seemed to him that the smarter a man was, the more likely he was to pretend he knew more than he did. Like the way the drunkest fellow at the pub was always the one who was most sure he could handle another pint. Tweaked-leg would sooner sell his own grandmother as a footstool than admit he didn’t know what Wayne was talking about.

“Quickly,” Wayne said, gesturing. “We’ve got to hold it up while I ratchet the saprostomous underlays! You’ll need to supervise while I work!”

Tweaked-leg sighed, but walked out. Thankfully, his thick-necked companion followed. Within moments, Wayne had this guy pushing against the supports of the ship’s pontoon while tweaked-leg observed, a few guards joining in to help.

A soft thump from behind indicated that Wax had dealt with the guard at the door. Normally Wayne would feel left out, since he didn’t get to do any hitting. This time though, Wayne got to make a bunch of idiots stand with their hands pressed against some wood, thinking they were keeping the ship from tipping over.

So it evened out.

* * *

“Please.”

The creature spoke with a strange accent, but the voice was unmistakably human. Marasi breathed in and out in sharp breaths, regarding that hand reaching for her. A human hand.

Lips that didn’t move … polished skin … That wasn’t a face, but a *mask*. This wasn’t some horrible creature, but a person in a wooden mask, the eyeholes caught by the shadows. What Marasi had mistaken for fur was thick blankets clutched around the person’s shoulders.

“Marasi?” MeLaan asked. The kandra appeared in the doorway. “I got it open. What are you doing— What the hell is *that*?”

“It’s a person,” Marasi said. The masked one turned toward MeLaan, and the new angle lit the holes in its mask, illuminating human eyes with brown irises.

Marasi stepped forward. “Who are you?”

The person turned back to her and said something completely unintelligible. Then it paused, and said, “Please?” That was a man’s voice.

“We’ve got to go,” MeLaan said. “Safe is open.”

“Is the spike inside?” Marasi asked.

“See for yourself.”

Marasi hesitated, then hustled into the other room, passing MeLaan.

“Please!” the man cried, huddled against the bars, reaching out.

The safe gaped open in the corner of the room. The top shelf was cluttered with objects, including the little Allomantic grenade. Prominent among them was also a length of silvery metal. Kandra spikes, as proven in the Bleeder case, were smaller than Marasi might have once imagined—less than three inches long, and slender, not at all like the spikes in Death’s eyes.

She knelt beside the safe, taking it out.

“We have it,” Marasi said, turning toward MeLaan. “Do you want to carry it?”

MeLaan shook her head. “We don’t touch one another’s spikes.”

Marasi frowned, remembering the stories. “Didn’t the Guardian—”

“Yes.”

MeLaan’s face remained impassive, but her tone was stern. Marasi shrugged, tucking the spike into her purse, then searched in the safe. She left the banknotes—stupid, she knew, but it felt more like really robbing to take those—and took back the little cube that stored Allomantic charges.

Beside it were several other small relics—each was coinlike, with cloth bands attached to the sides. They too bore the strange inscriptions in an unknown language. Marasi picked one up, then looked over MeLaan’s shoulder into the other room, where the man in the mask slumped against his bars.

Marasi tucked the disc in her purse, then reached farther into the safe, taking out something she’d noticed earlier. A small set of keys. She stood up and strode through the room.

“Marasi?” MeLaan asked, sounding skeptical. “It might have some kind of disease.”

“He’s not an *it*,” Marasi said, stepping up to the cage.

The figure twisted to regard her.

Hand quivering only a little, she unlocked the cage, getting the right key on the second try. As soon as the lock clicked, the figure lunged for the cage door, throwing it open. Outside, he stumbled—he obviously hadn’t been allowed to stand up straight for some time.

Marasi backed away until she was beside MeLaan. The tall kandra woman watched with a skeptical expression, arms folded, as the masked figure staggered up against the boxes, holding to them. He panted, then lurched away from the boxes toward the back of the room. There was a door there that Marasi hadn’t noticed in the gloom, and the man frantically shoved it open, stepping into the next room. Lights flicked on as the man found a switch within.

"If he alerts the guards, I'm blaming you," MeLaan said, joining Marasi as they walked after the man. "I would hate to have to tell Wax that…" MeLaan trailed off as they reached the next room over.

"By the Father and the First Contract," MeLaan whispered.

The floor was stained red. Operating tables of sleek metal crowded one wall, gleaming garishly compared to the macabre floor. On the wall hung a dozen wooden masks like the one the man wore.

He had fallen to his knees before them, looking up. Dried blood stained the wall where it had dripped from a few of the masks.

Marasi raised her hand to her mouth, taking in the gruesome scene. There were no bodies, but the blood bespoke a massacre. The man she'd rescued lifted his mask with a trembling hand, tipping it back so it rested on the top of his head, exposing his face. A young face, much younger than she'd imagined. A youth not yet twenty, she guessed, with a short, wispy beard and mustache. He stared up at those masks, unblinking, hands spread to the sides in disbelief.

Marasi stepped forward, moving to lift the hem of her skirt so as not to brush that bloody ground—before remembering she had on trousers.

As she reached the youth, he turned to her.

"Please," he whispered, tears in his eyes.

* * *

Wax stepped into the room.

Telsin sat twirling a pencil in her hand. There was a speaking box before her on the table, but making no sound. She turned lazily to see who had entered, then froze in place, gaping.

He closed the door quietly, aluminum gun in his other hand. He started to speak, but Telsin leaped from her chair and threw herself into his arms. Head against his chest, she started weeping softly.

"Rusts," he said, holding her, feeling awkward. "What did they do to you, Telsin?" He wasn't certain what he'd expected from their reunion, but this hadn’t been it. He didn’t think he’d ever seen her cry. He certainly couldn’t remember it.

She shook her head, pulling back, sniffling and setting her jaw. She looked … old. Not that she was ancient, but he remembered her as a youth, not a middle-aged woman.

Stupid though it sounded, he hadn’t expected age to come for Telsin. She had always seemed invincible.

“No other ways out of this room?” Wax asked, glancing about.

“No,” she said. “Do you have another weapon?”

He pulled out one of his Sterrions and handed it to her. “Do you know how to use it?”

“I’m a fast learner,” she said, looking far more comfortable now that she had a gun in hand.

“Telsin,” Wax said. “Is he here? Our uncle?”

“No. I was just speaking with him through that device. He likes … he likes to check in on me. I have to tell him how wonderful I think my accommodations are. He pretends I’m his guest, even still.”

“Well, you’re not. Not anymore. Let’s go.” Hopefully Wayne’s distraction was still working.

Telsin, however, sat down in her chair again. She gripped that gun in both hands, held before her, but she stared unseeingly. “There’s so much to ask. Why did you come back? Rusts … why did you *leave*, Waxillium? You didn’t come when I sent to you, when I was engaged to Maurin, when our parents died—”

“There isn’t time,” Wax said, seizing her by the shoulder.

She looked up at him, dazed. “You were always the quiet one. The thoughtful one. How did you get here? I … Your face, Waxillium. You’re old.”

The door suddenly slammed open. The tall, thick-armed man that Wax had fought on the train stood there, looking stunned. He turned from Wax to Telsin, and opened his mouth.

Telsin shot him.

* * *

“We need to go,” MeLaan said.

“We’re bringing him,” Marasi said, pointing to the man.

“Why?”

“Haven’t you figured it out, MeLaan?” Marasi asked. “That ship out there *wasn’t* built by the Set. It’s from somewhere else, someplace distant and alien. It probably wrecked near our coast, and the Set brought it here to be studied.”

MeLaan cocked her head. “Harmony does say odd things sometimes, about other peoples, not from the Basin—” She blinked, focusing on the man kneeling on the bloody floor. “Wow. *Wow*.”

Marasi nodded. Proof that there was life past the Roughs, and the deserts beyond. She couldn’t let him stay here, particularly not with the Set.

“Bring him then,” MeLaan said, moving out of the room. “And let’s get back to the meeting point.”

Marasi gestured toward the way out, trying to usher the masked man along. He just knelt there on the bloody floor, looking up at those hollow masks on the wall.

Then, with a trembling finger, he reached up and slid his mask back down over his face. He stood and pulled his blankets tight, shambling after Marasi as she crossed the room with the cages and entered the study.

MeLaan was already out in the hallway beyond. Marasi fetched her rifle and moved to join the kandra. Rusts, what was Waxillium going to say when he found out she’d picked up a stray? She could almost hear his voice. *You freed him, Marasi, but for all he knows you’re a member of the same group who apparently killed his friends. Be careful.*

She stopped at the door and looked back, gripping her rifle more tightly. Waxillium could be a curmudgeon, but he was right more often than not. The masked man might be dangerous.

He had stopped inside the room with the safe, looking about, seeming dazed. How long had he been in that little cage, trapped in the darkness?

Listening as his friends were taken, tortured, and killed.

Rust and Ruin …

His eyes found the safe, fixating upon it, and then he crossed the room in a shuffle. He reached inside, and for a moment she assumed he was going for the banknotes. But of course not—he pulled out one of the little discs with the straps.

He held it up, seeming awed, then shucked off the blankets he'd been wearing like a cloak. She'd expected him to be wearing a loincloth or something savage underneath, but instead he was dressed in trousers that went down to just below his knees, under which he wore tight white socks. His shirt was loose and white, and over it he wore a snug red vest—matching his mask in coloring—with a double row of buttons up the front.

She'd never seen clothing like it before, but it was hardly *savage*. The man yanked up one sleeve, exposing his arm, and strapped on the disc by its cloth ties. He let out a relieved sigh.

Looking toward her again, he seemed more confident now. He was a short man, even a few inches shorter than Wayne, but seemed to have grown a foot by standing up straight and discarding those thick blankets. But rusts, how were they going to sneak him out? He was hardly inconspicuous with that mask. Perhaps Marasi and MeLaan could openly move short distances in here without drawing attention, but this man certainly couldn't.

A series of gunshots rang out in the warehouse.

Perhaps sneaking wouldn't be an issue.

20

The corpse slumped into the room, one hand still on the doorknob, face frozen in an expression of shock. Telsin had fired four times and had only hit twice, but that was enough.

Wax cursed, grabbing his sister by the arm and towing her across the room. With his other hand, he found a vial of metal flakes on his belt.

“I’ll kill them all, Waxillium,” she whispered. “Each and every one of them. They held me.…”

Great. On one hand, he couldn’t blame her. On the other hand, this was going to be rusting inconvenient. He downed the metal vial, then peeked out of the doorway to see the engineers and carpenters scattering for cover as guards came running toward Wax’s position. A few were very near, the ones Wayne had led away, and one pointed at him and shouted.

The room’s flimsy walls seemed like they’d be about as effective against bullets as stern words were against the town drunk. As the first soldier took a shot at him—Wax shoved back with a Steelpush—he made a decision.

“Hang on to me,” he said, pulling Telsin to his side. He took one step out of the room, fired into the ground, and sent them on a Push up into the air.

Soldiers pointed, leveling guns, but in a moment he was on the top of the large ship. As he'd seen earlier, it was wide and flat up here, though the planks were smoother than the deck of any ship he'd seen, and the gunwales were like the crenellated tops of a fort or old tower.

He dropped Telsin. "I'll be back soon," he promised, leaping over the side of the ship. The man who had shot at him earlier wasn't giving up, and fired more rounds. Splinters popped off the sides of the ship as Wax fired Vindication and dropped the man. Wax landed, bounced off a stray nail, then skidded to a stop beside a stack of boxes where Wayne was hiding.

"What?" Wayne asked. "Get impatient?"

"My sister shot one of them."

"Nice."

Wax shook his head. Soldiers had started to pour into both ends of the large structure. "Not nice. There will be kill squads mixed among those soldiers, Wayne. Aluminum bullets. We need to get Marasi and MeLaan and go. Fast."

Wayne nodded. Wax took another draught of steel flakes, in case he lost his gunbelt, then nodded. "Speed us to the other side."

Wayne ran out, and Wax followed. Gunfire sounded, but Wayne popped up a speed bubble. It only covered about ten feet, but that was plenty to throw off aim. Wayne let Wax pass him, then they charged through the edge, side by side. The bubble collapsed, and bullets zipped through the air back where they'd been.

They ran on, but about the time the soldiers got another bead on them, Wayne created another bubble. This lurched them forward again, and shortly they were able to dive behind the broken section of the ship's pontoon and take cover. Soldiers cried out, confused by the Allomancy—but if there were kill squads among them, trained hazekiller hit men, they wouldn't be so easily fooled.

Wax led the way, darting along the front of the ship, in its shadow. As soon as someone started firing, Wayne tossed up another bubble, and the two of them repositioned. Wayne made to run out, but Wax stopped him, arm on shoulder.

“Wait.”

Safely inside this speed bubble, Wax looked back across the cavernous hall. They were close to the eastern side, and soldiers in slow motion set up a perimeter, clogging the doorway and kneeling in ranks. Captains at the rear yelled, pointing, and bullets flew toward the last spot where Wayne and Wax had been seen.

Uncomfortably, more shots streaked through the air where—if they’d been following their previous pattern—they would have exited the speed bubble.

“Damn,” Wayne said, eyeing the bullets. He tossed over his canteen. Wax took a drink, judging distances and feeling the surreal sensation of standing calmly in a maelstrom of gunfire, sipping apple juice.

“They’re goin’ all-out,” Wayne said.

“Our reputation precedes us. How much time have you got left?”

“Two minutes, maybe. I’ve got more bendalloy on the horse, in case. The kandra stocked me up before we left.”

Wax grunted. Two minutes could go very quickly. He pointed at the large hole in the ship’s side, where a plank ramp led to the thing’s insides. “I saw the ladies go in there.”

“Funny,” Wayne said, “’Cuz *I* see them peekin’ out over there.”

Wax followed his gesture, and indeed saw MeLaan’s face behind a barely opened door out of one of the rooms at the side of the warehouse. Wax took a deep breath. “All right. Those armies will cut us apart, Allomancy or no, if we don’t hide quickly. Those rooms will do. We can move through them toward the outer wall of the building, I can break through it, and we flee into the night that direction.”

“Right,” Wayne said. “And your sister?”

“She should be safe for the moment,” Wax said. “Once we break out, I’ll launch myself to the roof, then come back down through the open part and grab her.”

“Sounds good,” Wayne said, “’cept for one thing.”

Wax handed back the canteen. “Here.”

“Ha!” Wayne said, taking it. “But I was talkin’ about *that*.” He pointed toward the ship. A figure was climbing down one of the rope ladders that hung over the side of the ship. Telsin had *not* stayed put.

“Rust and *Ruin*,” Wax snapped.

“Under a minute left, mate.”

“Get her inside a bubble!” Wax shouted, gesturing. “I’ll join the other two. Go!”

They split, the speed bubble falling. A sudden storm of gunfire assaulted Wax’s ears as he dropped to the ground, feet forward, and Pushed against the metal supports in the ship behind him. He skidded across the packed dirt of the floor, bullets flying overhead, and reached the door that MeLaan flung open for him. His heels hit the threshold—the corridor had a wooden floor—and he popped up onto his feet, landing inside with a dusty thump.

“I’ll have you know,” Marasi said, “that *we* managed to do our job without alerting anyone.”

“I’ll send you a plaque,” Wax said, pointing toward a strange, short man standing behind her. “What the hell is that?”

The man pointed back.

“His people must have built the ship,” Marasi said. “They had him caged in there, Waxillium.”

“Damn,” MeLaan said from the doorway. “That army isn’t playing games.” It was hard to hear her over the gunfire.

“I found my sister,” Wax said. “Suit’s people must know how angry that will make him. We need to—”

“Wax!” MeLaan said, pointing.

He squeezed back up beside her. Wayne had almost reached his sister, who pressed herself against the ship’s side, eyes frantic. But Wayne had been hit. He lurched in place, holding his shoulder, as another bullet hit him right in the neck. He fell in a spray of blood.

Wayne could heal from that, with his new, strange metalmind. Unfortunately, the soldiers didn't stop firing. Another bullet hit Wayne's side as he dropped and played dead, then another. In an eyeblink he was healed and up, but then another round dropped him.

They were prepared. They knew. You want to kill a Bloodmaker? Knock him down and keep shooting.

Seeing his friend bleeding, facing some fifty men on his own, awakened something primal in Wax. He didn't think; he didn't shout orders. He tore from the hallway in a furious Push on the nails in the walls, soaring out into the warehouse proper a foot or so above the ground, pulling up dust in his wake.

The soldiers had been waiting for this. They had formed up on both sides of the warehouse, using boxes as cover, and they sent out twin waves of bullets—completely uncaring that they risked catching one another in the crossfire. Killing an Allomancer was worth the danger.

They could only wish to be so lucky.

To Wax's eyes, the room became a frantic network of blue lines, a loom full of a mad weaver's threads. He shouted, Pushing to both sides, shoving sprays of bullets in either direction and creating a ballooning hub of open space.

Several bullets continued to fly, though he noticed them only because one clipped him on the shoulder. Wax spun and yanked Vindication from her holster. A second volley came, and—his mind instantly matching blue lines with bullets fired—he shot once, dropping one of the men among the ranks who had fired an aluminum bullet.

More bullets came in a storm, but Wax swept them aside like dishes off a table. He was at the mercy of anyone firing aluminum, so he kept moving, dashing across the floor and leaping, Pushing behind himself and severely reducing his weight once he'd finished Pushing. The result was immediate; he sped up like an arrow, flying through the air with a roar of wind in his ears.

He landed before Wayne in a skid and Pushed bullets away from the healing man with a roar, then increased his weight and *Pushed* on the hull of the ship nearby. The wood crumpled, nails popping free of joints and planks tearing away before his fury, creating a second hole.

“Inside!” he shouted at his sister, prone on the ground nearby.

She nodded, scurrying in, and Wayne—still bleeding from a dozen different places—joined her in a crawl, throwing himself in through the opening.

Can’t let them stay there, Wax thought, Pushing himself away as another round of bullets pelted the area. One didn’t deflect when he Pushed it, but he couldn’t pick out the owner from among the dozens of firing men. Damn.

The ship was a death trap. Yes, it would provide cover, but if they took refuge there the troops would surround them. But Wayne needed a moment to heal. That meant keeping the soldiers—

Three men in jet-black suits launched in succession over the hunkered-down soldiers. The guns they bore had no Allomantic metal trails. Wax cursed, dropping Vindication and ripping the shotgun from its holster on his leg.

The first of the Allomancers to land Pushed on Wax. He felt it as a jolt on the shotgun as he leveled the thing—increasing his weight and setting it against his shoulder—to fire.

The Allomancer smiled, Pushing on the slug as it left the barrel. But the huge powder load of the gun—designed to bring down Thugs—sent the man sprawling backward from his own Push. Dazed, he was just able to glance up as the next slug hit him in the face.

Thanks, Ranette.

The other two Allomancers ducked down as they landed, expecting more fire, but the powerful shotgun held only two rounds. Wax dropped it into its holster as he knelt, grabbing Vindication.

Behind! If there was a kill squad from one direction, they’d likely send another for him the other way too. The regular soldiers were mostly a distraction.

He twisted, Pushing around himself and leveling Vindication to surprise a man and woman in suits sneaking up on him. He dropped the woman.

The male Allomancer opened fire. Too many shots. No metal lines. Wax—

The bullets froze in the air.

Wax blinked, and then noticed something that had fallen to the ground near the enemy Allomancer: a small metal cube. Marasi crouched inside the doorway where she'd been hiding, MeLaan standing over her and drawing fire—absorbing bullets with her flesh like it was no big deal.

Wax grinned, then stepped aside. The Allomantic grenade ran out a second later, and the man who had been trapped inside the bubble fired again, trying to kill a Wax who was no longer there.

Wax leveled his own gun and killed the fellow.

* * *

Marasi wished she knew where her earplugs had gotten to. Honestly, how did Waxillium survive without them? The man had to be half deaf by now.

A bullet popped up dust on the ground near her. MeLaan knelt beside Marasi, giving her cover from one direction and taking another series of hits. She grunted. "This doesn't hurt," she said. "But it's not particularly *pleasant* either."

Ahead, Waxillium dodged shots from two more members of the kill squad and scooped up the device. Marasi leveled her rifle, trying to concentrate. Everyone was moving so quickly, and the *bullets*. They zipped in the air all around her. She brought down several soldiers, trying to focus on the ones that were firing in her direction. Many had taken shelter behind boxes on either side, so they weren't firing in coordinated volleys anymore. They seemed to know that their job was to make a lot of noise and try to distract Wax while others, better equipped and better trained, actually tried to take him down.

Still, it was remarkable he didn't get hit. Waxillium dashed past, mistcoat tassels flying, and swept bullets from the air. Then he launched himself toward the catwalks above.

Two men in suits followed. Allomancers. Marasi took aim at one and fired, but her shot was deflected.

Speaking of which … Though gunfire still popped in the huge room, no bullets hit the ground near Marasi, and none seemed to be striking MeLaan.

But why? Then Marasi spotted the little cube nearby. Waxillium had charged and then dropped it in front of them as he ran by. Marasi grinned, fishing an aluminum round from her purse. She could feel the device Pushing on her gun, but it was far enough away that it didn't matter.

A hand fell on her shoulder. She jumped, then found the small masked man behind her. Rusts! She'd almost forgotten about him. His other hand was frozen halfway toward his mask, and behind it his eyes were wide.

She followed his gaze, which was focused on Waxillium, who landed beyond them. He must have increased his weight manyfold, for he was able to Push a group of boxes by their nails and send them flying backward, along with many soldiers.

"Fotenstall," he whispered in awe.

"Allomancer," Marasi said with a nod.

"Hanner konge?"

"I have no idea what that means," Marasi said. "But that cube thing will soon stop buzzing, so we need to move. MeLaan? Do we retreat back?"

"Please," the masked man said, gesturing toward the ship. He pointed frantically. "Please!"

Marasi ignored him, scrambling across the ground—entering the warehouse proper—and grabbing the device. It had indeed stopped buzzing.

Waxillium landed nearby, sweeping a round of shots away from her, and Marasi charged the thing in her hand. It seemed like last time … yes, by burning just a tad of her cadmium she was able to get it buzzing, yet not slow herself down too much. She somehow poured the power into the device and tossed it at the people who landed nearby, chasing Waxillium.

It froze them in place.

“Nice work so far,” Waxillium said. “But we’re going to have to split up. Get back into those hallways. I’ll follow soon. You’re too exposed out here!”

The men lurched out of her speed bubble. Waxillium started firing at them, but they ducked, and one grabbed the little cube.

Marasi brought him down with the aluminum bullet she’d chambered.

Waxillium grinned. “Go!” he said, charging the other man, who yelped and leaped into the air, Pushing himself away. Waxillium scooped up the little cube as he passed, then he too launched into the air.

“Come on,” MeLaan said, grabbing Marasi by the shoulder. A bullet took the kandra in the face, ripping off a chunk of her cheek and exposing green crystalline bone underneath.

The masked man cried out in fear, pointing and mumbling in his language.

“You should see me in the mornings,” MeLaan said. She gestured back toward the hallways. Marasi moved to follow.

The masked man pulled on her arm, pointing more frantically at the ship. “Please, please, *please*.”

Marasi hesitated. A bad idea in the middle of a firefight. Fortunately, most everyone seemed to be concentrating on Waxillium.

Something bit her in the left side. She looked down to see what it was, and was surprised to see red blooming on her coat around a hole.

A bullet hole.

“I’ve been shot!” she said, more surprised than pained. Shouldn’t that hurt? She’d been *shot*!

She stared at the blood, *her blood,* until the masked man grabbed her by the shoulders and started towing her toward the ship. MeLaan cursed and helped him. Marasi realized she’d dropped her gun, and struggled against them, trying to reach for it, suddenly frantic that she *not* leave it behind.

That made almost no sense, and part of her acknowledged it, but rusts—

Shock, she thought. *I’m going into shock.*

Oh, hell.

* * *

Wax soared high above the floor of the warehouse, zipping past the catwalks, where several gunmen with rifles had set up. He flipped Ranette's ball device outward—catching it around the railing of the catwalk—and hung on tight, pivoting sharply in the air. The gunmen started, trying to draw a bead on him as he landed behind them.

He stepped back and Pushed one gunman out at just the right moment, shoving him into the air as the last of the kill-squad Allomancers shot up past the catwalks, bearing a stunned expression at Wax's sudden change of direction. He collided with the rifleman in midair, and Wax turned, Pushing the other rifleman away. The poor man screamed as he fell.

Farther down the catwalk, two more men had set up with crossbows and wooden shields. Lovely.

Wax increased his weight. The entire catwalk shattered as he crashed downward through the wood, destroying the supports. He Pushed himself off a falling bar, shooting back out into the air, spinning Ranette's ball device on its cord. Above him, the suited man shook off the frantic gunman, dropping him and Pushing off to send himself into the air.

Wax flipped Ranette's ball upward and let go of the cord, still falling backward. The confused Allomancer caught the device by the cord as it passed.

Wax shot him in the chest.

Shouldn't drop your Allomantic shield, Wax thought, twisting in the air as he fell. *Even to catch a neat toy.*

As he approached the ground, Wax slowed himself on a spent bullet, then landed with a flare of mistcoat tassels. The dead Allomancer thumped to the ground beside him.

The ball dropped from his fingers and rolled toward Wax. "Thanks," Wax said, scooping it up. Where was—

Marasi. Down and bleeding, being dragged into the ship. *Damn!* Wax growled, launching himself into the air again as more soldiers fired. This place was a mess. Too many soldiers, many of whom were advancing on the ship, hiding a group of men with modern crossbows behind them. As one got close to the ship, Wayne peeked out.

"Wayne!" Wax shouted, passing overhead. He pocketed Ranette's ball and pulled out the Allomantic grenade—which was buzzing furiously—and dropped it.

Wayne looked up just in time to snatch the thing from the air, then looked down at it with surprise. When the first bullet curved away from him, Wayne grinned instead, then let out a whoop and flung it at the men in front of him. The thing rolled among them, tossing weapons aside with its power.

Wax sighed, landing on the top of the ship. Of *course* he'd throw it.

Wayne followed by jumping among the approaching soldiers, energetically laying about with his dueling canes. A bullet came startlingly close to Wax. More aluminum? As Wayne enthusiastically busted heads, Wax launched off the ship and landed among the advancing soldiers, increased his weight, and Pushed outward with a flare of strength. That tossed people away from him in a blast.

When the bodies fell, three men stood, stupefied, holding guns Wax couldn't sense.

He brought them down with a Sterrion—his other guns were out of bullets—then turned as he heard something distant. Horns blaring, a command. He leaped to the side, enough men dead or dropped that he could get a clear view out one of the doors into the night.

Men were streaming out of the buildings in the village. Dozens. He had a sinking feeling of dread. How long until his metals gave out? How many could he fight until someone with a crossbow or an aluminum bullet got lucky and hit him? He roared, launching himself upward in a leap over the fallen men he'd Pushed. Many were climbing to their feet. He was one man, not an army. He needed to run.

"Back!" he shouted at Wayne, who already had a crossbow bolt sticking from his thigh. The shorter man joined him, running toward cover inside the wrecked ship.

* * *

Marasi squeezed her eyes shut against the pain. It had finally come, arriving with a vengeance. MeLaan had given her a painkiller to chew, but it hadn't done anything yet.

"Dieten," the masked man said, putting her hand on her wound, which he'd bound with a strip of cloth from his shirt. She cracked an eye and saw him nod encouragingly, though with the mask down over his face she could see only his eyes.

Well, she wasn't dead. Even if *rusts* it hurt. And she thought she remembered reading somewhere that getting shot in the stomach—even on the side—wasn't good.

Don't think about that. What was going on? She gritted her teeth, shoved down her panic at being wounded, and tried to assess their situation. MeLaan watched the battlefield from beside the hole in the ship. Waxillium's sister stood nearby, cradling a handgun, eyes intense. Outside, gunfire, grunts, and screams accompanied Waxillium and Wayne doing what they did best: creating havoc.

Apparently the havoc quota had been filled, for a few moments later Waxillium swooped in through the hole. He nodded to MeLaan, his face shining with sweat, breathing heavily. Wayne scrambled in a moment later. He had a *crossbow bolt* sticking from his leg.

"Well, that was fun," Wayne said, plopping down and taking a deep breath. "Ain't been whooped so bad since the last time I played cards with Ranette."

"Marasi," Waxillium said, walking over to her. He pushed the masked man aside. "Thank Harmony you're alive. How bad is it?"

"I … don't really have much to compare it to," she said through clenched teeth.

Waxillium knelt beside her, lifting the bandage and grunting. "You'll live, unless that nicked the intestines. That could be bad."

"What kind of bad?"

“Painful bad.”

“I might be able to do something,” MeLaan said. “I’ll check it out once we’re safe. Speaking of which, how exactly *are* we going to get away?”

Waxillium didn’t respond immediately. He looked exhausted. He glanced up at his sister, who was still muttering and holding her pistol. Outside the ship, it had gone unnervingly quiet.

“Our best bet is still going out through one of the warehouse’s walls,” Waxillium said. “We’re going to have to push toward those rooms Marasi and MeLaan were in.”

“That’s gonna be dangerous, Wax,” Wayne said, stumbling to his feet, *still* ignoring the bolt in his thigh. “They’ll have formed up, knowing we’re going to try to make a break for it.”

“We can manage,” Waxillium said. “With me Pushing, we get to those rooms, find an outer wall, then break through.”

“And if they’re waiting on the other side?” MeLaan asked.

“Hopefully they won’t be. It—”

“Guys,” Wayne said. “I don’t think we have time to plan!”

Gunfire sounded outside again, and bullets started snapping against the hull. Wayne scrambled away from the opening. Marasi thought she could hear Irich out there, shouting for the soldiers not to damage the ship, but the firing continued. It seemed someone had overruled him.

“Please,” the masked man said, taking Marasi by the arm and pointing.

Marasi managed to get to her feet, though the pain made her eyes water. The masked man gestured, holding her by the arm.

She followed. Easier than trying to complain.

“We’re going to have to push through it,” Waxillium said from behind.

“I want to *kill* them,” Waxillium’s sister said. “I need more bullets.”

“Yeah, let’s have you focus on running, Telsin. Everyone get ready on my mark. Wayne, did you happen to grab that grenade?”

“Yup.”

“We’ll use it to make a speed bubble at the halfway point,” Waxillium said.

“No luck there,” Wayne said. “Completely outta bendalloy.”

“Damn,” Waxillium said. “Then we…” He trailed off. “Marasi? Where are you going?”

She continued limping along with the masked man. “He wants to show us something,” Marasi said.

“They’re coming!” Wayne shouted, peeking around the corner. “Fast!”

Marasi focused on moving down the corridor, one hand holding to her wound. She heard Waxillium curse, then gunfire sounded in the hallway. Waxillium was firing on men trying to pile in through the hole after them. *Trapped in here,* Marasi thought.

The masked man let go of her suddenly, then scrambled up the hallway ahead. “Don’t—” Marasi said, but he stopped, threw open a panel in the wall, then reached in and pulled something.

A section of the ceiling, painted with one of the strange golden patterns, fell open. A rope ladder dropped down, hanging only halfway to the floor. The masked man jumped up and grabbed it.

“There’s a hidden room here!” Marasi called.

“Better than nothing,” Waxillium called back. “Everyone up!”

Wayne went next, jumping up and catching the ladder and climbing it with a lithe step. MeLaan could touch it without needing to jump, and she hoisted herself next. Waxillium’s sister barely managed to grab the thing, but she climbed up with a hand from MeLaan.

Marasi stood looking with despair at the ladder, trying to imagine climbing it with her pain, until Waxillium seized her around the waist and Pushed them both up in a spinning leap. They landed inside the trapdoor, finding themselves in a narrow, low-ceilinged room fitted with a few chairs that were bolted to the floor. A single small window to the left looked out of the hull, letting in a sliver of light. The place looked like a railway compartment.

“Great,” Wayne said. “At least now we can die in relaxed positions.”

The masked man was fiddling with something near the wall. Some kind of trunk? He got it open and pulled out another one of those small, coinlike medallions with the straps on the sides. He pulled off the one he was wearing, and immediately gave a visible shiver, then slapped this one on instead.

“How’s that?” he asked, looking back at them.

Marasi blinked in shock. He’d said it in her language—strangely accented, true, but intelligible.

“No?” the man asked. “You’re looking at me confused, still. These things never work right. She swore that—”

“No, it works!” Marasi said. “At least, *I* can understand you.” She looked to the others, who nodded.

“Aha!” the man said. “Great, great. Put these on.” He tossed a medallion at each of them. “Touching the skin, please, maskless barbarians. Except you, Metallic One. You will not need one, yah?”

Marasi took hers and settled down on one of the seats, feeling dizzy. The painkiller seemed to finally be doing something, but she was still exhausted.

Below, shouts sounded in the hallway.

“Somebody better shut that door,” the masked man said, crawling down on the floor and fiddling with something underneath a counter.

Wayne obliged, pulling up the ladder, which was tied to the trapdoor. It clicked closed, leaving them in even greater gloom. A gunshot sounded below, then another. Marasi jumped as the bullets *hammered* against the floor of the room.

“Does this place have any other exits?” Waxillium asked.

The masked man yanked on something, and the room shook with a jolt. “Nope,” he said.

“Then why did you lead us here?” Waxillium demanded, grabbing him by the arm.

The masked man looked back at him. “Medallions on, yah?”

More bullets pelted the floor, but didn’t penetrate into the room, fortunately.

“What do they do?” MeLaan asked.

“Make you lighter,” the masked man said.

As soon as he said it—as soon as she knew what it did—something inside of Marasi understood. She was holding metal that, somehow, she could *feel*. It wanted something from her, and she poured it in, filling the metal … the *metalmind*.

She grew lighter, rising on her seat, the force of her body pushing less on her backside. Telsin gasped, obviously experiencing a similar sensation.

“Now that,” Wayne said, “that’s *right* strange.”

“Great Metallic One,” the masked man said, glancing at Waxillium, “I, of course, wouldn’t *dare* give orders to one of your stature, even if you wear your bare face out at all times. Who am I to judge? Even if you look equally crass as these others—even the cute one—I’m sure you’re not. But, if I may be so bold as to suggest—”

“What?” Waxillium asked.

“A little Push,” the masked man said, pointing downward. “On my mark.”

“If I Push downward,” Waxillium said, “I’ll just fly up and hit the ceiling.” He hesitated as the masked man pointed to a pair of straps connected to the floor, with wooden handholds at the ends. Waxillium looked at them, then looked at the masked man, who nodded eagerly.

Even in the darkness, Marasi could see the curiosity on Waxillium’s face. Despite the men shouting below, the muffled sound of gunshots, he was still the lawman—the detective. Questions teased him. He stepped over to the straps, picked them up, and held them firmly, bracing himself with his feet on the floor.

“Ready,” he said.

“A moment,” the masked man said, reaching for a lever. He yanked it hard, and the entire room shook, then *slid* sideways. Out of the hull, like a drawer in a dresser being opened. Marasi could see out of the front end now, which proved to have a large glass window that had been blocked by wood earlier.

“Go!” the man said.

Waxillium must have Pushed, for the room shook, then rose into the air. They weren’t in a room at all, but in a small boat that could detach from the main vessel.

ence have brought us closer to an answer.

(Continued on back.)

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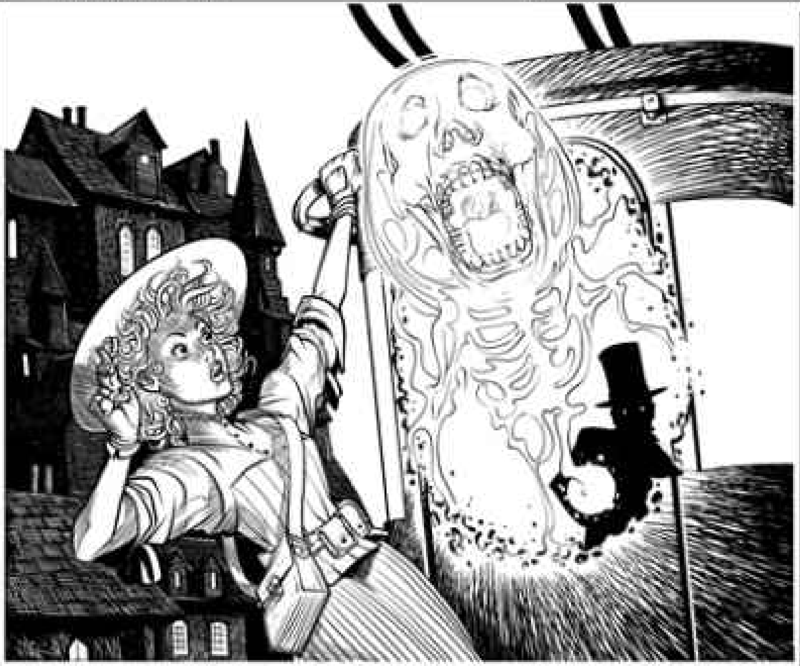


them stood the haunted man. When last we'd met, he'd worn a mistcloak, the hood of which had obscured his face, but now I could see him clearly.

Lightning flashed in his cold eyes and wind disarranged his sand-colored hair. In one hand, he held the rolled tapestry like a baton. With the other, he pointed an alien-looking pistol at me. No doubt the origin of the ghost he'd launched earlier.

The runes on the pistol's side flared emerald. I burnt chromium and lunged forward into a Baz-Kor move meant to stop Coinshots before they fill you full of holes. Just as the green runes turned red, my hand touched the metal of the device.

When I drain a Misting of metal reserves, I feel something I can only describe as pulling power from the metal and returning this power to some external source. The metal remains, but the power is gone.

I imagined that same intent as I touched the pistol. I pulled power from the device and returned it . . . elsewhere.

The red glowing runes went out like candles in wind.

It worked! The haunted device was certainly something of another world—neither Feruchemical nor Allomantic—yet my chromium touch had affected it.

The haunted man glanced at the pistol and gritted his teeth. "What in helmore did you do?"

He touched a few of the runes on the side of his pistol-like device, and the symbols began to glow again. He pointed the gun at me, this time mere inches from my face. My chromium trick had not broken the pistol as I'd hoped. If I couldn't permanently leech its power, I'd have to relieve the haunted man of it altogether.

My Baz-Kor training took over, and I executed a movement meant to knock a gun from an aggressor's hands. One smooth maneuver took me behind my opponent and out of range of the pistol. Now the haunted man stood between me and the gondola's rusted opening. My next move sent the alien pistol flying from the man's grip and out into open air.

The haunted man spun to meet me, surprise registering in his eyes. I took the instant to seize the map.

Unfortunately, I was only able to grab one end, and it unrolled between me and the haunted man. Each of us held tight to the long ends of the map. I only needed to find the pouch on it with my father's instructions sewn inside. After that, it did not matter to me whether this thief took the rest of the tapestry or not.

"Shadows, woman!" said the man. "Leave me alone!" He clutched his end of the map and jumped from the hole in the side of the car.

The sudden jolt on the tapestry pulled me to the ground and dragged me across the floor till my head and arms dangled out over the void, though I still managed to hang on with both hands to my edge of the map, the only thing keeping the haunted man from falling to his doom.

"Bloody helmore!" he yelled. "Would you just let go!"

"I will *not*!" I gripped the fabric tighter.

"It's just a stupid map." He studied the tapestry. Adjusting his grip a few inches to the side, he crumpled the linen between his fingers and began to climb.

"It's my inheritance!" I yelled back.

"I don't care if it's the Survivor's bathrobe. *Just give it to me!*"

"You are entirely disagreeable!" I said.

"Then you're starting to figure me out."

I trust you will not judge me too harshly if the pleasant timbre of the comic stranger's voice had me completely enchanted. His hair like gold, his eyes like blue ice. If you ever meet me in person, I will gladly give a more detailed description.

"Truthfully," I said, "a little politeness on your part could have avoided this whole debacle, and you wouldn't be hanging fifty feet above death from the threads of a poorly rendered map. Climb in. Let's come to an agreement."

He reached up as if to take my offer, but something in his hand flashed in the light of the stars. Instinctively, I burnt metal, releasing one hand to touch the device.

It was an everyday hunting knife.

"Politeness," he said with a grumble. "That's not how I work."

He clutched his side of the tapestry and cut through the top of it with his knife. Between us, a V shape formed just before the map ripped completely in half.

I gasped as he fell backward into the mist, clutching his piece of the tapestry.

I pulled away from the edge, frantically searched my half of the map for the hidden pocket, and found it almost immediately. The lack of a knife, however, meant I would have to wait to open it until I returned to the mansion. Still, I was relieved that although the haunted man was gone and my father's map ruined, I had the information I needed to continue my quest. I do admit, though, that if the haunted man still lives, he wound up with the better half of the map.

After disembarking the lift, I walked to the location where my foe would have hit the ground. I found no trace of him, and though no one witnessed his fall, a young white-haired man was there and offered to tell me a story. I declined.

It was not until I had returned home that I lit up the electric lamp and found Pinecone Allomouser the Third asleep with her kittens on my bed. Careful not to disturb them, I used a sewing knife to make quick work of the tapestry's hidden pocket. Inside was a folded piece of vellum written on in my father's flowing penmanship.

My dearest Nicelle,

In this letter I am at long last able to disclose to you the secrets of the Unknown Constructs of Antiquity....

—Continued next week!!—

21

Wax stood in the center of the small vessel, Pushing against some kind of plate down below, designed—obviously—for this very purpose. It would be attached to the shelf the vessel had been on—not something that rose with it, but some kind of launchpad for an Allomancer to use as an anchor.

This vessel, though tiny, should still have been too heavy to lift. He should have broken those straps he held to, or been crushed by the force of his own Push. Yet he managed it. He held to those straps—essentially hitching himself to the ship—and lifted it, with all the people inside, off a ledge that had extended from the mother vessel.

It's those medallions, he realized. *They allow everyone to do as I do—to make themselves light, nearly as light as air.* That meant he was really only lifting the ship itself, along with their equipment.

The vehicle was small—barely six feet wide, though it was maybe twice as long—and had wide openings like doorways on either side. Those had faced walls inside the pocketlike shelf they'd popped out of, but now they exposed the air.

All in all, the thing felt like the cab of a motorcar with the doors ripped off. As the craft rose, small pontoons on extended arms folded down and clicked into place. Wax had a brief view of surprised soldiers on the portion of the catwalk he hadn't broken, and then they were out, rising through the opening in the warehouse roof.

The strange man in the red mask scrambled through the vehicle and leaned out one of the holes in the walls to look downward. He looked solemn as he saluted the ship below, then bowed his head, whispering something.

Finally, he turned to Wax. "You are doing great, O Divine One!"

"I'm not going to be able to Push it much higher," Wax said with a grunt. "The anchor is too far away."

"You shouldn't need to," the man said, scrambling past Marasi—he patted her on the shoulder—then fiddling with some controls at the front of the machine. "I'll need the primer cube, please," he said, holding out a hand to Wayne.

"Huh?" Wayne said, looking away from where he'd been hanging out the other door to look down. A few distant gunshots sounded as soldiers took potshots at the hovering vehicle. "Oh, this?" Wayne took out the Allomantic grenade.

"Yah," the man said, snatching it. "Thanks!" He spun and pressed it against Wax's arm until—as he was still burning steel to keep them afloat—it started buzzing.

The little man turned and snapped the cube into place under the shelf at the front of the ship. The machine shook, and then something started thumping underneath them. A fan? Yes, a very large one, blowing downward, powered by an unseen motor.

"You can let go, Great Being of Metals," the man said, looking back at Wax. "If it suits your divine desires."

Wax eased off on his Push. They immediately started to sink.

"Reduce your weight!" the man cried. "I mean, if it is aligned with your magnificent will, O Metabolic One."

"Metabolic?" Wax asked, filling his metalmind and decreasing his weight. The ship stabilized in the air.

"Uh," the masked man said, seating himself at the front, "well, we're supposed to use a different title each time, yah? I've never been very good at this, Your Magnificence. Please don't launch a coin directly into my skull. I'm not insolent, just stupid." He pushed a lever forward, and smaller fans began whirring at the ends of the pontoons.

"They're not boats," MeLaan whispered. "Not this one, not the big one below. They're flying ships."

"Harmony's Bands," Marasi said. She was very pale, holding to her wounded stomach.

Flying ships that ran on some kind of Allomancy. Rust and Ruin. Wax felt the world seem to lurch around him. If electricity had changed life so dramatically, what would *this* do? Wax forced himself to shake out of his stupor and looked to the short masked man. "What's your name?" Wax said.

"Allik Neverfar, Tall One," the man said.

"Wait here a moment then, Allik."

"Whatever you desire, O—"

Wax jumped out of the vehicle before he could be praised—or insulted, he couldn't tell which these were—again. He got a better look at the small airship as he left. Yes, it looked more like a long motorcar cab than it did a boat, with that flat bottom. The large fan was separated from the ship by a short space, allowing air intake above. The doorways on the walls didn't seem to close; it was fortunate the seats had straps.

Wax dropped through the sky, afraid to Push off the small airship, but was able to use anchors down below to slow and direct himself toward the forests north of the camp.

He wanted to be quick. That ship wasn't up so high that it would be safe if they had access to cannons. He dropped into the forest and surprised Steris, who sat on her horse with the others in a line, all packed and ready to go.

"Lord Waxillium!" she cried. "I assumed you'd be coming, and prepared—"

"Great," Wax said, walking to his horse. "Get down, and grab your pack and Marasi's."

She did so without objection or question, pulling off her small pack of essentials, then fetched that of Marasi. Wax did the same for MeLaan and Wayne.

"We're leaving the horses?" Steris asked.

He released the horses, then grabbed Steris around the waist. "Turns out we've found something better." He pulled out one of his older guns, then dropped it—he'd need a large chunk of metal to get them high enough—and Pushed, launching them from the forest and into the sky.

He'd worried about maneuvering—doing so up high wasn't easy without skyscrapers to Push against. However, Allik steered the ship toward him, allowing him to get Steris one of the armbands, then set her into the vessel before climbing in himself. It managed to accept the new weight of the supplies, though Allik had to pull a lever to keep them from sinking.

"Seven people," the masked man said. "And supplies. Above the weight *Wilg* is supposed to carry, but she should manage. Until our metal runs out. The question is, where do you want her to take us?"

"Elendel," Wax said, walking toward the front of the little ship.

"Great," Allik said. "And … where is that?"

"North," Wax said, pointing. The little shelf at the front of the vehicle—like the dash of a motorcar—had a compass set into it. "If you head west first though, and find the river, we can—"

"No." Telsin seized Wax by the arm. "We need to talk."

Gunfire sounded below, followed by an echoing boom. Great. They *did* have a cannon.

"Just get us away from here," Wax said to Allik as he let Telsin tow him toward the back of the small ship. He passed Wayne, still hanging halfway out of one of the two open doorways and gawking. Marasi was on the floor, with MeLaan checking her wound, while Steris had already started packing their bags into an efficient pile between two of the seats.

The fans whirred and the ship began to move—not quickly, but steadily—away from the enemy camp. Wax settled onto a bench at the back of the ship with his sister. Rusts … Telsin. Finally. It had been a year and a half since he'd promised to stop his uncle and free her. Now here she was, sitting beside him.

She looked like a modern woman, with her hair in curls, wearing a stylish dress of contemporary fashion—thin material, hem up right below the knees, a neckline to emphasize a long neck and delicate drooping chains. If you didn't look at her eyes, you could have assumed she was a fine lady on her way to a ball.

If you did look into her eyes, all you found was coldness.

"Waxillium," she said softly, "there's a weapon of some sort to the south, hidden among the mountains separating the Basin from the Roughs. Uncle Edwarn has found it. He's on his way there."

"How much do you know?" Wax asked, taking her hand. "Telsin, do you know what he's planning? Is it a revolution?"

"He doesn't tell me much," she said. Her voice was so calm, so cold, compared to how it had been before. Always full of passion, ever nudging him to do things he should not. It seemed like they'd leeched the life out of her, during her months of captivity. "We have dinner together most nights when he is here, but he grows angry if I ask about his work. He wanted me for one of his … his projects, originally, but my age makes that impossible. Now I am just a pawn. To use against you, I believe."

"No longer," Wax said, squeezing her hand. "No more, Telsin."

"And if he finds this weapon?" she asked. "He seems *convinced* it is there, and that it will give his group the power to dominate the Basin. Waxillium, we *can't* let him have it." Some passion returned to her eyes, some of the Telsin he remembered. "If he seizes the Basin, then he will take me again. He will kill you, and he *will take me*."

"We'll get to Elendel, inform the governor, and then send an expedition."

"And if that takes too long?" Telsin said. "Do you know what the weapon is? The thing he is searching for?"

Wax looked down at the medallion strapped to her arm. "Feruchemy and Allomancy anyone can use."

"The Lord Ruler's own power, Waxillium," Telsin said, passionate. "The Bands of Mourning. We could find them, use them before he does. He has to travel by foot on a treacherous mountain trail. I heard them preparing for it. We, however…" She looked out the doorway, toward the passing landcape. This was a view few ever saw. A view once reserved only for Coinshots.

"Let me check on Marasi," Wax said. "Then we'll decide."

* * *

Marasi soared above the world, looking at a land bathed in starlight. Trees like shrubs. Rivers like streams. Hills like little lumps. The land was Harmony's garden. Was this how He saw it, with God's perspective?

The Path taught he was all around, that his body was the mists—that he saw all and *was* all. The mists were pervasive, but visible only when he wanted them to be. She'd always liked this teaching, as it made her feel His nearness. Yet other aspects of the Path bothered her. There was no structure to it, and because of that everyone seemed to have their own idea of how it should be followed.

Survivorists, like Marasi herself, regarded Harmony differently. Yes, he was God, but to them he was more a *force* than a benevolent deity. He was there, but he was as likely to help a beetle as he was to help a man, for all were the same to him. If you *really* wanted to get something done, you prayed to the Survivor, who had—somehow—survived even death.

Marasi winced as MeLaan continued to work. "Hmm, yes," MeLaan said. "Very interesting."

Marasi lay on the floor of the vehicle, near the doorway, head on a pillow made from a wadded-up jacket. The wind wasn't too bad, contrary to what Marasi would have expected, as they weren't moving terribly fast—though the fans did make a fair amount of noise.

MeLaan had spread Marasi’s uniform aside in a very improper way, barely keeping the most important bits covered. Nobody seemed to care though, so Marasi didn’t make a fuss. Besides, that was far less disconcerting than what MeLaan was doing to her. The kandra woman knelt over Marasi, hand on her side, the flesh having liquefied and run down *into* the wound.

It was discomfortingly like what had happened when she’d picked the lock, as if Marasi were just another puzzle to be manipulated. Rusts, she could *feel* MeLaan poking around in there with bits of flesh that had become tentacles.

“I’m going to die, aren’t I?” Marasi asked softly.

“Yes,” MeLaan said. Light from a small lantern from their packs illuminated her face. “Nothing I can do about that.”

Marasi squeezed her eyes shut. It served her right, running about like some lawman from the Roughs, scrambling through firefights and assuming she was invincible.

“How is it?” Waxillium’s voice asked. Marasi opened her eyes to see him leaning over, and she found herself blushing at her state of near-nudity. Of course. Her final emotion would be embarrassment because of damned *Waxillium Ladrian*.

“Hmm?” MeLaan asked, pulling her arm out, the flesh forming back over her crystalline bones. “Oh. I caught a hole in the intestines, as you’d guessed. Sewed that up tight, using some catgut I made from some spare intestines I had brewing. I patched it with some of my flesh, grafted on.”

“She’ll reject the flesh.”

“Nah. I took a bite and replicated her skin. Her body will think it’s hers.”

“You *ate* part of me?” Marasi said.

“Wow,” Waxillium said. “That’s … wow.”

“Yeah, well, I’m incredible,” MeLaan said. “Excuse me.” She reached her hand out the open side of the flying vehicle, then dropped a stream of something vile. “Had to slurp up things inside there to clean everything out. The safest way.” She eyed Marasi. “You *owe* me.”

“Is that the part of me you … um … ate?” Marasi asked.

“No, just what was leaking,” MeLaan said. “That grafted patch over the wound should hold until you heal on your own—I melded it to your veins and capillaries. It’s going to get itchy, but don’t scratch it, and let me know if it starts to go necrotic.”

Marasi hesitated, then prodded at her wound with exploratory fingers. She found only tight flesh, like that from a scar, patching the hole. It barely hurt, more a dull pain like a bruise. She sat up, amazed. “You said I was going to die!”

“Of course you’re going to die,” MeLaan said, cocking her head. “You’re mortal. Can’t turn you into a kandra by just— Oh, you thought *today*. Hell, girl. That shot barely clipped you.”

“You’re an awful person,” Marasi said. “You realize this.”

MeLaan grinned, nodding to Waxillium, who offered a hand to help Marasi up. She quickly straightened her uniform, though MeLaan had cut it in ways that made modesty difficult. She’d have to dig into her pack for something new, but how would she ever change in the vehicle’s crowded confines?

She sighed, taking Waxillium’s hand and letting him pull her to her feet. For now she kept one hand at her waist, preventing her trousers from falling off. He offered her his mistcoat and, after a moment’s hesitation, she put it on.

“Thanks,” she said, noting that underneath the coat he had been wearing a bandage of his own, upper left arm, right below the shoulder. Had he also been shot during the fighting? He hadn’t said anything, which made her feel even more foolish.

Waxillium nodded his head toward the front of the vehicle, where Allik sat with his feet up on the dash, leaning back. Due to the mask, it was impossible to read his expression, but she felt his posture was reflective.

“You feel up to talking with him?” Waxillium asked.

“I suppose,” Marasi said. “I’m a little light-headed and a lot humiliated. But other than that, I’m fine.”

Waxillium smiled, then took her arm. “You got ReLuur’s spike?”

“Yes,” Marasi said, though she fished in her purse to make sure, to have her fingers on it, just in case. She held it up.

“These degrade if they’re out of a body, don’t they?” Waxillium said, glancing at MeLaan, who had settled in a doorway with her legs dangling out, completely ignoring the perfectly good seats.

“How do you know about that?” she asked.

“The book Ironeyes gave me.”

“Oh, right,” MeLaan said, her expression darkening. “That. You know, the Lord Mistborn was wrong to create it.”

“I’ve read it, regardless.”

MeLaan sighed, looking out. “The longer it’s away from ReLuur, the more its Blessing will weaken. But they are powerful, and can last some time—besides, even if the Blessing degrades, the spike will still restore his mind anyway. With some … loss of memory.” Her voice caught on that last part, and she turned away.

“Well, we have it thanks to you,” Waxillium said, looking at Marasi. “And I have my sister. So we should turn back to Elendel and find out what Allik knows.”

“We should,” Marasi agreed. “But your uncle—”

“You heard my conversation with Telsin?”

“Enough of it.” When she hadn’t been distracted by the fear that she was dying. *Stupid kandra.*

“And what do you think?” Waxillium asked.

“I don’t know, Waxillium,” Marasi said. “Did we really come here for the spike, or even your sister?”

“No,” he said softly. “We came to stop Suit.”

Marasi nodded, then dug a little more in her purse, bringing out the notebook she’d stolen from Irich’s study. She flipped to the page with the map and held it so both she and Waxillium could see it.

It had a spot clearly labeled *Second Site,* some kind of base camp in the mountains. And beyond that, something high up among some other peaks, indicated as dangerously high. Notes from Irich said, *Temple reported to be here*.

"The weapon," Waxillium said, brushing the map with his fingers. "The Bands of Mourning."

"It's real."

"My uncle thinks it is." Waxillium hesitated. "And I do too."

"Can you imagine him as a Mistborn," Marasi said, "and a Full Feruchemist? Immortal—like Miles, only far worse. Possessing the strength of all metals. Like the Lord Ruler come again."

"My uncle said he was going to the second site," Waxillium said, studying the map. "It's possible that his expedition hasn't gotten to the temple yet, though. They know where it is, from their interrogations, but they were still planning their expedition. With this machine, we could beat him there."

Waxillium drew in a deep breath, then nodded toward Allik up in his seat. "Will you talk to him? Find out what he knows."

"The man's been through a *lot*, Waxillium," Marasi said softly. "I think they must have tortured and murdered his friends. He doesn't deserve an interrogation right now."

"We don't deserve a lot of things that happen to us, Marasi. Talk to him, please. I'd do it, but the way he treats me … well, I think you'll get better answers."

She sighed, but nodded and climbed past Wayne, who was—unsurprisingly—slumped in a seat and snoring away. Steris sat with hands in her lap, content, as if riding in a flying machine were an everyday occurrence. Telsin sat in the very back.

Marasi wobbled. Rusts, she *was* light-headed. Fortunately, the front of the vehicle had two seats, the one Allik used and a smaller stool next to him. Allik glanced at her, and she realized she'd been wrong about his posture. He wasn't pensive, he was *cold*. He sat there with arms wrapped around himself, and even shivered a little.

She was surprised. It was colder up here than down below, true, but she wasn't particularly cold herself. Then again, she was wearing Waxillium's coat now.

Allik turned back toward the windshield as she settled down on the stool. "I had assumed," he said, "that everyone up here in the land of the Sovereign was a barbarian. Nobody wears masks, and what your people did to my crewmates…"

He shivered again. This didn't seem to be the cold.

"But then you let me out," he continued. "And you had one of *them* with you, a grand Metalborn of the precious arts. So I'm left confused."

"I don't feel like a barbarian," Marasi said. "But I doubt all but the most barbarous of people *feel* like one. I'm sorry about what happened to your friends. They had the misfortune of running across a group of very evil people."

"There were fifteen masks on the wall," Allik said. "But *Brunstell*'s crew was nearly a hundred, yah? I know that some died in the crash, but the rest … do you know where they might be?" He looked to her, and she could see pain in his eyes behind the mask.

"Maybe," Marasi said, surprised to realize she might. She turned the notebook around, showing the map. "Do you know anything about this?"

Allik stared at it. "How did you get that?"

"I found it in the desk of one of your captors."

"They couldn't communicate with us," Allik said, taking the notebook. "How did they get this from us?"

Marasi grimaced. While torture was a terribly ineffective method of interrogation, at least as far as legal cases were concerned, she suspected it *was* a powerful motivator for overcoming barriers.

"You think they're here," Allik said, pointing at the map. "You think the men who captured them, the evil men, brought my crewmates to find the Sovereign's temple."

"It sounds like something Suit would do," Marasi said, glancing back at Waxillium, who had settled into a seat behind her and leaned forward to listen. “Bring guides, or experts, just in case. He’s on his way here, the leader of those who killed your friends.”

“Then that is where I must go,” Allik said, sitting up and changing the direction of the ship. “*Wilg* and I will drop you somewhere, if you demand it, for I’m not *about* to make that one angry.” He thumbed over his shoulder at Waxillium. “But I’ve got to find my crewmates.”

“Who is the Sovereign?” Waxillium asked from behind.

Allik winced. “Surely he was not as great as you, Remarkable One.”

Waxillium said nothing.

“He’s staring at me, isn’t he?” Allik asked softly of Marasi.

She nodded.

“Eyes like icicles,” Allik said, “drilling into me from behind.” He spoke more loudly. “The Sovereign was our king from three centuries ago. He told us he was your king first. And your god.”

“The Lord Ruler?” Waxillium said. “He died.”

“Yes,” Allik said. “He told us that too.”

“Three hundred years ago,” Waxillium said. “Exactly?”

“Three hundred and thirty, Persistent One.”

Waxillium shook his head. “That’s after Harmony Ascended. Are you *sure* about those dates?”

“Of course I’m sure,” Allik said. “But if you wish me to revise my beliefs in order to—”

“No,” Waxillium said. “Just speak the truth.”

Allik sighed, rolling his eyes, an odd expression to see from one in a mask. “Gods,” he whispered to her. “Very temperamental. Anyway, the Sovereign came about ten years after the Ice Death happened, yah? Silly name, but you’ve got to call it something. The land was beautiful and warm, and then it froze.”

Marasi glanced toward Waxillium, frowning. He shrugged. “Froze?” she said. “I don’t recall hearing of freezing.”

“It’s frozen right now!” Allik said, shivering. “You had it here too, you must have. Over three centuries ago, the Ice Death came.”

"The Catacendre?" Waxillium said. "Harmony remade the world. Saved it."

"*Froze* it," Allik said, shaking his head. "The land was soft and warm, and now it is harsh and broken and frozen."

"Harmony…" Marasi whispered. "Allik's from the South, Waxillium. Haven't you read the old books? The people from the Final Empire never went in that direction. The oceans boiled, supposedly, if you got too close to the equator."

"The people who lived down south adapted," Waxillium said softly. "No Ashmounts to fill the sky with ash, to cool it…"

"So, the world nearly ended," Allik continued. "And the Sovereign, he came and he saved us. Taught us this." He gestured toward the armband he wore, with the medallion, then paused. "Well, not *this* one in particular. This one." He reached into his desk and took out the other medallion he'd worn, the one he'd taken out of the safe back in the warehouse. He put it on, swapping it for the language one, and sighed in contentment.

Marasi watched him, then raised her hand as if to touch his, and he nodded, allowing it. His skin grew warmer even as she sat there. "Heat," she said, glancing toward Waxillium. "This medallion stores heat. That's a property of Feruchemy, right?"

Waxillium nodded. "The most archetypal. In the ancient days, my Terris ancestors dwelled in the highlands, often traveling through snow-filled mountain passes. The ability to store their heat, then draw upon it, allowed them to survive where nobody else could."

Allik sat, basking in his warmth for a time, before—with obvious reluctance—pulling off his medallion and swapping it quickly for the one that somehow allowed him to speak to them.

"Without these," he said, holding up the first medallion, "we'd be dead. Gone. All five peoples extinct, yah?"

Marasi nodded. "And he taught you this? The Sovereign?"

"Sure did. Saved us, bless him. Taught us that the Metalborn were pieces of God, each one of them, though we didn't have any of those at first. He gave us devices, and started the Firemothers and Firefathers, who live to fill these medallions so the rest of us may leave our homes and survive in this too-cold world. After he left, we used his gifts to figure out the rest, like these that make us fly."

"The Lord Ruler," Marasi said, "seeking redemption for what he did up here by saving the people down there."

"He was *dead,*" Waxillium said. "The records—"

"Have been wrong before," Marasi said. "It had to be him, Waxillium. And that means the Bands…"

Waxillium moved up beside Allik, on the other side. The masked man eyed him, as if made very uncomfortable by his presence.

"These," Waxillium said, plucking the heat-giving medallion off the dash. "You can create these, as you wish?"

"If we have the Metalborn to do so, and the Excisors, yes. The Excisors are the gifts the Sovereign made for us."

"So with one of those devices, a Metalborn can create a medallion like this—one for *any* Allomantic or Feruchemical ability?"

"Holy words," Allik said. "But if anyone can say them, it is you, O Blasphemous One. Yes. Any."

"And did one of you create a medallion that grants *all* of the powers?" Waxillium asked.

Allik laughed.

Marasi frowned. "Why laugh?"

"You think us gods?" Allik said, shaking his head. "You see that? The one you hold? It is very complicated. It is stored with the ability to give yourself a sliver of holiness."

"Investiture," Waxillium said. "This inner ring is nicrosil. You tap it, and it grants you Investiture—turning you into a temporary Feruchemist who has the ability to fill a metalmind with weight." He held up the medallion. "The iron on this is for convenience, right? You can fill it, but so long as you're tapping the Investiture, you could touch any source of iron and turn it into a metalmind."

“You know much about this, Mysterious One,” Allik said. “You are wise and—”

“I learn quickly,” Waxillium said, glancing at Marasi. She nodded for him to continue. This was fascinating … but the Metallic Arts was not one of her areas of expertise. Waxillium had a passion for it though. “What’s this other ring built into the medallion?”

“That grants the warmth,” Allik said. “It is a grand combination—*two* attributes, from separate rings. Took us long to make these work, yah? The one I wear now, also grants two. Weight and Connection. I’ve *seen* medallions with three. Twice in my life only. Every attempt at four has failed.”

“So wear multiple medallions,” Waxillium said. “Strap thirty-two to your body, and have all the abilities.”

“I’m sorry, great Wise One,” Allik said. “You are obviously very knowledgeable about this, and know things that none of us would *ever* think to try. How could we be so foolish as to not realize that we could simply—”

“Shut it,” Waxillium growled.

Allik flinched.

“Doesn’t work?” Waxillium asked.

Allik shook his head. “They interfere with each other.”

“So to create one with multiple powers…”

“You must be very skilled,” Allik said. “More skilled than any who has lived among us. Or…” He chuckled. “Or you’d have to have all the powers, rather than adding yours to the medallion, then passing it to another to have it added to! If that were the case, you’d be a great god indeed. As powerful as the Sovereign.”

“He *did* create one of these,” Waxillium said, rubbing the medallion with his thumb. “One with all of the abilities. A bracer, or a set of them, that granted all sixteen Allomantic abilities and all sixteen Feruchemical abilities.”

Allik wilted.

"That's why you're here, isn't it, Allik?" Waxillium asked, looking into the man's eyes.

Marasi leaned forward. Waxillium said he wasn't good at reading people, but he was wrong. He was great at it—so long as reading them involved bullying them.

"Yes," Allik whispered.

"You traveled from your lands to find the Bands of Mourning," Waxillium said. "Why are they up here?"

"Hidden away," Allik said. "When the Sovereign left us, he took them with him, along with his priests, his closest servants. Well, some of them eventually returned, yah? With stories to tell. He'd taken them on a great journey, and had them build a temple for him in a hidden range of mountains. He'd left the priests there, with the Bands, and told them to protect them until he returned for them. And, that was dumb, yah? Because we could *really* use those to fight the Deniers of Masks."

"Deniers of masks? Like us?"

"No, no," Allik said, laughing. "You're just barbarians. The Deniers are *really* dangerous."

"Hey," Wayne called from behind them, hair whipping in the wind, hat held in his hands. When had he woken up? "We knocked your big ship outta the sky, didn't we?"

"You?" Allik said, laughing. "No, no. You could not have so harmed *Brunstell*. He fell to a great storm. It is a danger of our ships—so light, so easily troubled by storms. We would have landed *Brunstell*, but we were in the mountains, searching. We were so close to the temple, but then … yah. Blown out of the mountains over your lands. Smashed into that poor village. The barbarians there were nice at first. Then the others came."

He shrank down in his chair.

Waxillium patted him on the shoulder.

"Thank you, Wonderful One," Allik said. He heaved a sigh. "Well, ever since the Sovereign's elite told us the stories, we've tried to find the bracers."

“Find them?” Waxillium said. “You told us he’d left the Bands there for himself.”

“Well, yah, but everyone interprets it as a challenge. A test sent by the Sovereign? He was fond of those. Why would he let priests tell us about them, if he didn’t want us to come claim them?

“Only, after years of searching, everyone started thinking the temple was some fancy legend, lost in time. Everyone’s uncle had a map, yah? The type worth less than the paper it’s written on? But then, recently, some interesting stories started circulating. Talk of lands up here, and of mountains nobody had explored. We sent several scout vessels, and they returned with stories of your people, in this land.

“Well, five or six years back, the Hunters sent a big ship up with a quest to finally find the temple. And they succeeded, we think. One skimmer came back with a map of where they’d been. The rest froze to death; a blizzard in the mountains overwhelmed their medallions.”

Wind rocked the small ship as Allik fell silent.

“We’re going after that temple, right?” Marasi asked, looking at Waxillium.

“Damn right we are.”

22

Marasi had plenty of time to think as they traveled southward toward the mountains. Allik guessed the trip would take about two hours, which surprised her. She'd imagined an airship to be a fast-moving vehicle, but this was likely slower than a train. Still, being able to proceed there in a straight line instead of having to follow the landscape was a distinct advantage.

Even with the fans whirring in their casings, the airship seemed to spend much of its time gliding. Allik would increase their height or lower it, trying to find favorable winds—and he complained that he didn't know the airstreams of this area. He did his navigation using devices she didn't recognize along with some startlingly accurate maps of the lower Basin. How often had these people prowled through the skies up here, hidden in the darkness, observing and making their maps?

Most of the others slept, comfortably tapping warmth as Allik had taught them. When Marasi considered sleeping herself, she could not banish the image of falling from one of those doorways and awakening just as she hit the ground—even with the waist belts tying them all in.

Wayne gave her something else to help with the pain, though he wouldn't say what it was. It felt good though, and she could mostly ignore her aching side. She settled into the seat beside Allik and chatted with him. She felt guilty, as that required him to wear the medallion that let him translate, but he seemed as eager to talk as she was. She could not say whether that was because he was starved for interaction following his incarceration, or if he wanted to be distracted from thinking about the friends he'd lost during his journey.

Over the next two hours, he told her more about the medallions they wore, and the legends of the Bands of Mourning. In Allik's lore, the Lord Ruler had filled them with a great deal of every attribute—but had also crafted them to grant any person who used them the ability to draw those forth. A kind of challenge to mankind to find them, along with a warning not to. Allik didn't seem to consider this a contradiction at all.

He also spent more time telling her about life where he was from—a place over the mountains, across the entire Southern Roughs and the wastelands beyond. A distant, wonderful place where everyone wore masks, though not everyone wore them in the same way.

Allik's own people preferred to change masks according to their professions or moods. Not each day, certainly, but it wasn't uncommon for them to change their mask as often as a lady in Elendel might change her hairstyle. There were other groups though. One gave a mask to each child, and those only changed once, when they reached adulthood. Allik claimed that these people—called Hunters—even grew *into* their masks somehow, though Marasi found that difficult to believe. Still other people, to whom he referred derisively, wore only plain, unpainted masks until they did something to earn a more ornate one.

"They are the Fallen," he explained to her, wagging one hand before himself in a gesture she didn't understand. "They were our kings, yah? Before the world froze. They offended the Jaggenmire, which is why everything went wrong, and—"

“Wait,” Marasi said, speaking softly so the others could sleep, “the … yayg—”

“Jaggenmire?” he asked. “It didn’t translate? You don’t have a word for it in your language, then. It’s like a god, only not.”

“Very descriptive.”

Surprisingly he lifted his mask, something she’d only seen him do that once, when he’d knelt before the masks of his friends. He didn’t seem to consider it an infraction of any sort, and kept talking. She liked being able to see his face, even if his wispy beard and mustache looked a little ridiculous—it made him look younger than he really was, unless he was lying about being twenty-two.

“It’s like…” he said, grimacing, “like a thing that runs the world, yah? When something grows, or dies, the Jaggenmire make that happen. There is Herr, and his sister Frue, who is also his wife. And she makes things stop, and he makes things go, but neither can—”

“—make life on their own,” Marasi said.

“Yah!” he said.

“Ruin and Preservation,” she said. “The old Terris gods. They’re one now. Harmony.”

“No, they were *always* one,” Allik said. “And always apart. Very odd, very complex. But anyway, we were talking about the Fallen, yah? They work doing anything they can to relieve their burden of failure. A compliment means a lot to them, but you have to be careful, because if you tell them they did well, they might take your compliment to heart and travel back to their people to tell everyone. Then *you* might be called in to testify about how good a job they did, so they can change their mask. And their language, that’s a *real* pain. I speak a smattering of it—always useful, so you don’t have to wear the medallion—and it makes my head spin as if I’d been flying too high for way too long.”

She smiled, listening to him go on, gesturing wildly as he spoke—which she figured was only natural, if everyone’s faces were covered all the time.

“Do you speak many languages?” she asked, as he took a breath, finally pausing his narrative.

“I don’t even speak my own that well,” he said with a grin. “But I’m trying. Seems like a good skill for a skimmer pilot to have, since it’s often my job to pilot *Wilg* and take people between ships or towers. And if I’m going to sit half the day in a class, I figure it should be something useful. Though mathematics has—”

“Class?” Marasi asked, frowning.

“Sure. What do you think we do all day on the ship?”

“I don’t know,” Marasi said. “Swab decks? Tie ropes. Um … trim … stuff. Deckhand types of things.”

He looked at her, eyes bulging, then slapped his mask down. “I’m going to pretend that you did *not* just compare me to a common *lowship*man, Miss Marasi.”

“Ummm…”

“You have to be something more special than that, if you want to fly. We’re expected to be gentlemen and ladies. We’ve thrown people *overboard* for not knowing the proper dance moves.”

“What, really?”

“Yah, really.” He hesitated. “All right, so we tied a rope to his foot first.” He made a gesture she had started to realize was something like a smile or a laugh. “He dangled there below *Brunstell* for a good five minutes, cursing up a storm. He never got the cistern three-step wrong again, though! And Svel always said to him…”

Allik trailed off, growing silent.

“And?” Marasi prodded.

“Sorry. His mask … Svel, I mean. On the wall…”

Oh. The conversation died, Allik staring out the front of the ship, then making a few adjustments to their heading. Outside, the landscape was dark save for a few pinpricks of towns, now far to their left. Though they’d initially skirted the Seran Range, Allik had moved the skimmer into the mountains about a half hour back. Now they flew over the tops of the peaks, having ascended higher than they'd been when flying over the Basin.

"Allik," Marasi said, resting her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry."

He didn't respond. And so, hesitantly—fully aware that she was probably doing something taboo—she reached out and lifted his mask. He didn't stop her, and the motion revealed eyes staring sightlessly, a tear trickling down each cheek.

"I'm never going to see them again," he said softly. "*Brunstell* is crashed; I'll never serve on him again. Hell, I'm never going to see *home* again, am I?"

"Of course you will," Marasi said. "You can fly there."

"*Wilg* won't last on the stone I've got," he said, wiping the tears from first one cheek, then the other.

"The stone?"

"Fuel," Allik said, glancing at her. "What, you think *Wilg* flies on clouds and dreams?"

"I thought it flew on Allomancy."

"Allomancy Pushes the impellers," Allik said. "But ettmetal is what supports it."

"I don't think that one translated either," Marasi said, frowning.

"Here, see," Allik said, kneeling down and opening the compartment where he'd put the little cube that Waxillium called an Allomantic grenade. It was attached to a metal shell, which glowed softly at the center. Allik pointed, and to the side she could see a greater light blazing with a pure whiteness. A stone, burning like a limelight.

Or like Allomancy itself, Marasi realized. "What kind of metal *is* it, though?"

"Ettmetal," Allik said, shrugging. "There's a little bit in the primer cube too, to make it work. A lot more to make a ship like *Wilg* go, and a lot, *lot* more to get *Brunstell* into the air. You don't have this metal?"

"I don't think so," Marasi said.

“Well, what we have in *Wilg*, it’ll be enough to fly us a day or two. After that, we’d need an Allomancer Pushing full-time. So unless His Greatness the Drowsy One back there wants to fly with me all the way back, I’m stuck, yah?”

“You said there was more on *Brunstell*.”

“Yah, but *they* have it.” He grinned. “At first, the evil ones didn’t know how to care for it. Got some wet. *That* was a good day.”

“Wet?”

“Ettmetal explodes if it gets wet.”

“What kind of metal *explodes* if you put it in water?”

“This kind,” he said. “Anyway, your evil men, they got most of ours.”

“And we’re going to stop them,” Marasi said firmly. “We’ll get your crewmates back, stick you on your ship—or some of these skimmers, if the big one won’t fly anymore—and send you home.”

He settled back in his seat, closing the panel under the dash. “That’s what we’re going to do,” he agreed, nodding. Then he eyed her, his mask still up. “Of course, your people don’t have what we do. No airships at all. So they’ll simply let me and mine soar away, no information demanded, with this technology?”

Rusts. He was clever. “Maybe we can give the governor some technology,” she said, “like a few medallions. Then promise him trade between our two peoples, fueled by the goodwill of having helped you and yours get home. That will erase some of the shame of what Suit did.”

“There are those from my lands who might find your Basin up here … tempting, with no defenses against attack from above.”

“All the more important to have allies among your people.”

“Maybe,” he said, pulling his mask back down. “I appreciate your genuine nature. You have no mask to hide your emotions. So odd, but welcome in this case. Still, I have to wonder if this will be more complicated than you say. If we do find the relics, what you call the Bands of Mourning, who keeps those? They are ours, yet I cannot see your Metalborn lord letting them slip away from him.”

Another difficult question. “I … I honestly don’t know,” Marasi said. “But you could say we have as much a claim to them as you, since it was *our* ruler who created them.”

“A ruler you killed,” he pointed out. “But let us not argue about it, yah? We will find what we find, and then determine what to do.” He hesitated. “I must tell you something, Miss Marasi. It is possible we will find nothing at the temple but destruction.”

She frowned, settling on her seat, wishing he still had the mask up so she could read his face. “What do you mean?”

“I told you of the ones who came seeking the temple,” Allik said.

“The Hunters,” Marasi said.

He nodded. “They were warriors, in the time before the freezing. Now they hunt answers to what happened to us, and secrets to making it never happen again. Miss Marasi, I have known many, and they can be a good people—but very, very stern. They believe that the Bands of Mourning were left with us as a test—but opposite the one we all assume. They think the Sovereign intended to see if we would take the power when we should not. And so…”

“What?” Marasi asked.

“Their ship,” he said, looking toward her, “that came up here first. It carried bombs, great ones, made from the ettmetal. Intended to *destroy* the Bands. They did not succeed, it is said. But anything could have happened. The place of the temple is said to be frozen beyond anything else in this world. A dangerous place for my kind.” He shivered visibly, then looked longingly at the medallion set on the desk before him.

“Go ahead,” Marasi said, “put it on.”

He nodded. They’d had to do this several times during the flight so far, letting Allik warm himself with the Feruchemical device. Marasi wore one herself, comfortably warm—though up this high, the air was probably freezing.

Allik settled back, and Marasi—curious—picked up the Connection medallion that he had set down. She turned it over in her fingers, noting the sinuous lines down the center, dividing it into separate metals. Iron for weight, duralumin for Connection, and most importantly nicrosil, to give her the ability to tap metals in the first place.

She knew enough Metallic theory to identify the metals, but Connection … what did it actually do? And how did that make him speak a *language* of all things?

Suddenly feeling foolish, she smiled and took off her medallion. The ship immediately dipped due to her restored weight. She let out a squeal of alarm and immediately donned the weight/Connection one instead, then blushed—making herself light again—as Waxillium whipped his gun out and leaped to his feet. So he hadn't been sleeping, but eavesdropping. He looked around to see what had caused the lurch.

None of the others stirred. Wayne kept snoring.

Marasi held up the disc to Allik, then tapped Connection. She waited for some reaction inside of her, but it didn't seem to do anything.

"We've been foolish," she said. "I could have been wearing this all along, and speaking *your* language. Then you could have been warm the entire time."

Allik grinned at her, then said something completely unintelligible.

"What's going on?" Waxillium said from behind her.

"Nothing," Marasi said, blushing again. It wasn't working. Why wasn't it working?

Allik gestured to her, and she switched back to her previous medallion—working very carefully this time to avoid causing a jolt, but mostly failing. How did he transition between them so smoothly?

He made a gesture, like a hand drawn across his face, that she thought indicated a smile. "Clever, but it won't work on you."

"Why?"

"Because we're in your lands," he said. "The visitor always has to wear the medallion. It's filled with Connection, yah? Blank Connection, to no place. But Connection can't just be connected to *nothing*, so when you tap it, it reaches out and connects you to the place where you are. Makes your soul think you were raised in this place instead, so your language changes."

Marasi frowned, though Waxillium perked up, pulling up between their two seats. "Curious," he said. "Very curious."

"It is the way of the world," Allik said with a shrug.

"Then why do you have an accent still?" Marasi asked. "If your brain thinks it was raised here?"

"Ah," Allik said, raising his finger. "My soul thinks I was raised here, in your lands, but it knows that I am Malwish by descent, and that parents are from Wiestlow, so I cannot help but have an accent, yah? I got it from them. It is how the medallions always work."

"Strange," Marasi repeated.

"Yah," Allik agreed. But Waxillium was nodding, as if it made perfect sense to him.

"Those mountains to the right," Waxillium said, pointing. "Those are some taller peaks than the ones we've been passing."

"Yah!" Allik said. "Good eye, O Observan—"

"Stop with the titles."

"Yes, um, O Confusing … er…" Allik took a deep breath. "Those are the peaks we're seeking. Getting close. We'll have to climb *Wilg* up even higher. Cold temperatures, dangerous altitudes."

He hesitated as Waxillium pointed at something ahead. Difficult to see, but distinct once Marasi noticed it. Light, hovering in the darkness—only a glimmer, but stark against the blackness.

"The Seran Range is uninhabited," Waxillium said, "except in a few of the valleys. Too cold, too many storms."

"So if there's a light…" Marasi said.

"Suit has left on his expedition," Waxillium said, standing up straight. "Time to wake the others."

23

Wayne was awakened quite rough-like, in a manner unbefitting his grand dreams, in which he was king of the dogs. Had a crown shaped like a bowl and everything. He blinked his eyes, feeling nice and warm, and got hit with a blast of air. Drowsy, he remembered he was flying in some kind of rusting *airship* with a fellow what had no face. And that was almost as good as that dog thing.

"Can you bring us down closer?" Telsin asked.

"If I do," the masked guy said, "they'll hear us, even with *Wilg*'s fans on low speed. We need to pass over those people below, but I will keep us very high."

Rusts! Wax's sister hung half out of the machine's open side, looking down, though Wayne could barely make her out with the light so low. He hadn't figured that Telsin would be the adventurous type, what with Wax being all calm and careful most of the time. Yet there she was, doing her best imitation of a pub sign flapping in the wind. He nodded in appreciation, then untied his little belt thing, and got up to look at what she was seeing.

He stepped over their packs, which had toppled from the neat stack Steris had made, then leaned out next to Telsin. That let him look down at a long line of people—lit by lanterns—trudging through what appeared to be waist-high snow. Poor sods.

Wax stepped up to the other opening, looking down with his spyglass. Wayne couldn't see much, himself. He held on with one hand and took out his box of gum, shaking it. Only one ball left. Damn. Well, at least it had plenty of powder on it. That would help perk him up, it would.

"Do you see him?" Telsin asked.

"I think so," Wax said. "Wait. Yes, that's him. I'll bet they left on their expedition the moment they got word of what happened with us at the warehouse." He reached into his holster and took out one of his guns. He gave the rusting things names, but Wayne could never keep them straight. It was one of the ones with the long tubey thing on the front what spat bits of metal at the bad guys.

"Let me do it," Telsin said, voice passionate.

Wayne hesitated, ball of gum halfway to his mouth. That was quite the bloodthirst this woman had.

"You can't make a shot like this," Wax said. "Not sure if I can either."

"Let me try," Telsin begged. "I don't care what it takes. I want him dead. Another will take his place, but I *want him dead*."

Wax sighted for a long moment, and everyone in the ship seemed to hold their breath. Finally, Wax lowered his gun. "No," he said. "Your testimony in court will do more against the Set than killing a man for no reason other than vengeance. And I'd rather have him to interrogate anyway." He holstered the gun.

Wayne nodded. Reliable chap, that Wax. Steady. The same on a good day and a bad. Wayne moved to retreat into the ship's interior, but as he scrambled over the seats, he somehow got tangled a little with Telsin and, in the process, kicked one of the packs out the opening.

Wayne stared down, aghast, as it fell and actually *hit* one of the men on the head.

“What did you do?” Telsin demanded.

Wayne winced.

“What did Wayne do now?” Marasi asked, a sense of resignation in her voice.

“He kicked that pack out right on top of them,” Telsin said.

“’S not my fault,” he said. “Wax woke me up too soon. Put me off balance.” He looked back at the ship’s other occupants. Wax sighed, moving up beside the pilot. Steris and MeLaan sat on the back bench, out of the way—MeLaan lounging in a rather attractive way, Steris bent over a large notebook. Taking notes? What was *wrong* with that woman?

Down below, the men in the snow held their lanterns high and scanned the sky, seeming confused.

“Move us away,” Wax said to the masked pilot, pointing. “Go the direction they’re hiking.”

“Yes, Decisive One,” the pilot fellow said, and the fans at the sides of the thing grew louder. “Hold on, everyone.”

The ship shifted. Not quickly, but it did start moving again. Neat trick that had been, staying in place while flying. Birds couldn’t do that, just Coinshots. Wayne moved forward, sidling past Marasi to get a good look out the front of the ship.

“Wind is picking up,” the pilot mentioned. “Might be a storm, as if things weren’t cold enough already.”

“There,” Wax said, pointing. “What was that?”

“I’ll bring us around,” the pilot fellow said, swinging the ship, which rocked precariously. Another gust of wind brought flakes of snow in through the openings in the ship’s walls.

“That’s it,” Wax said, peering through the curtain of snow. “Harmony’s Rings … it’s really here.”

“I don’t see anything,” Wayne said, squinting.

“Hold on to something,” the pilot fellow said. “Or make sure you’re strapped in. I’m going to land.”

So Wayne grabbed the man’s arm.

“Something *else*.”

Wayne grabbed the chair’s back, and good thing he did, since the ship pitched to the side as it came down. The landing wasn’t too bad, assuming you liked getting shaken about and then having your face smacked into the wall.

Wayne blinked, finding himself in blackness. A moment later MeLaan managed to relight her lantern and hold it up, showing that the ship had settled halfway on its side, one of the fan wings—which could fold up so the thing could fit in the larger ship—having bent up on its hinges, with a big heap of snow pushed in through the hole in the ship’s side.

“Is that how it usually goes?” Wax asked, standing up shakily on the sloping floor.

“Landing is difficult,” the pilot fellow admitted.

“Technically,” Marasi said from the back, “it’s not. It’s probably the easiest thing to do with a flying ship, assuming you’re not picky.”

Wayne snorted, climbing across the ship to the side that was pointed upward, and hopped out. The snow crunched when he dropped into it. He hadn’t expected that—the only snow he’d seen had been the occasional flurry up in the Roughs, and it never got anywhere *near* this deep. Why would it crunch? The stuff was made of water, not cereal flakes.

He stumbled out of the high pile of snow onto a windswept rocky portion of ground. Snow pelted him like grains of sand, but it didn’t seem to be coming from the sky, just getting blown in from the side. He shivered and tapped more warmth. The clouds happened to roll out of the way, releasing starlight like a bouncer stepping back and letting folks into the night’s most exclusive club.

That light cascaded down, white and calm, upon a rusting *castle* in the middle of the mountains. A bleak stone fortress, cut of the same stone as the field. It looked to be only one story, hunkered down against the wind, but it glowed in the starlight like the spirit of some ancient building from anteverdant days.

Wayne breathed out slowly, his breath making white mist before him. “Nice,” he said, nodding. “Nice.” The folks that built this, they had *style*.

Marasi clambered out of the ship, wearing Wax’s mistcoat for some reason, and almost fell face-first in the snow. She stood on top of the white fluff, a gust of wind almost knocking her over again, until suddenly she sank down into it farther with a crunch. She’d finally remembered to stop filling her weight metalmind. Easy mistake to make, if you weren’t accustomed to being a Feruchemist.

She pushed through the snow and joined Wayne, wiping melted snow from her brow. She looked to be doing well, considering that she’d been shot.

“Suit and his people aren’t far off,” she said. “And they know we’re here, now.”

“Then we find the Bands first,” Wax said from behind them. It was seriously unfair how he glided up out of the machine, then soared on a quick jump to land next to them, no stumbling in that snow. Seriously. Why had Harmony made the stuff? Didn’t seem to serve much of a purpose. “Everyone grab your things. Allik, remove the grenade from the ship, just in case.”

They all hurried to obey, Marasi climbing back in the machine, then joining Steris in handing the packs out. Allik emerged, wearing that mask of his still, and stood on the side of his ship, staring at the fortress and shaking his head. He then turned and patted his ship, like it was some kind of puppy, until Steris appeared and chased him away for some reason. A few moments later Marasi climbed out, wearing a dress instead of her uniform, but with trousers on underneath. She tossed Wax his mistcoat.

Figures. A woman *would* have to change outfits for this. Can’t infiltrate a remote, ancient temple without properly accessorizing. Wayne ran his hand through his hair, then had a moment of panic. His *hat*! He scrambled back toward the ship, looking around frantically, but then spotted it peeking from a snowdrift nearby, having fallen free as they landed. He picked it up with a sigh of relief.

“Everyone back,” Wax said, steadying himself with a stable footing, the wind blowing his mistcoat tassels back and whipping them about. The others moved away from the ship, and Wax grunted, Pushing. The ship skidded back softly into the snow, piling it up in a wave. Wax Pushed until the thing was completely buried.

“Nice,” Wayne said.

“Let’s hope one of their Coinshots or a Lurcher doesn’t spot it beneath the snow,” Wax said, turning toward the temple and shouldering his shotgun. “Come on, let’s get out of this wind.”

They picked up the packs and started across the stone field toward the fortress. Steris had found another lantern somewhere, and lit it. Wayne hurried his step and fell in beside that pilot fellow with the mask.

“You know,” Wayne said, “I’m an Allomancer too.”

The man said nothing.

“I figured you’d want to know,” Wayne said, “since it seems like this is your religion and all. In case you wanted someone else to worship.”

Again no reply.

“I’m a Slider,” Wayne said. “Speed bubbles, you know? Those fancy titles would work for me just fine, I think. Handsome One. Smart One. Um … Guy wif the Great Hat.”

The only sound was that of their footfalls and the gusting wind.

“Now, see,” Wayne said, “this is unfair. Wax doesn’t want you to worship him, right? But you *gotta* have someone to worship. It’s human nature. It’s ingratiated in us. So, I’m willin’ to be accommodatin’ and let you—”

“He can’t understand you, Wayne,” Marasi said, marching past. “He’s swapped metalminds to keep himself warm.”

Wayne stopped in place as they all hiked onward. “Well, when he gets his brain back, someone tell him I’m a god, all right?”

“Will do,” Wax called from up ahead.

Wayne sighed, moving to catch up, but then stopped. What was that off to the side? He shouldered his pack and hiked over, ignoring Marasi’s call that he turn back. There *was* something there, near the cliffs. A hulking shape bigger than a house, the exposed bits covered in frost.

Wax strode over, squinting against the wind, and grunted. “Another ship,” he said. “The one that the Hunters sent.”

“The who?”

“Group of people from Allik’s region,” Wax said. “They came here to destroy the place. Fortunately, it seems they didn’t succeed.” He turned to go, but Wayne nudged him, nodding toward a hand sticking from one of the snowbanks. Looking more closely, he was able to pick out a dozen corpses, perhaps more, lying there in this icy place, frozen for all time.

Wax nodded, then they hiked back toward the others. Marasi and Steris had waited, along with the masked man—who had crossed half the distance to the new ship, then stopped, staring at it. Telsin had strode on ahead, MeLaan tailing her. He quickly joined the rest of them as they followed after Telsin and MeLaan.

“Your sister,” Wayne said to Wax, “is kinda…”

“Severe?” Marasi said.

“I was gonna say bonkers,” Wayne admitted. “Though I’m not sure if it’s the good kinda bonkers or the bad kind, as of yet, as I haven’t had time to give it the proper evaluatin’.”

“She’s been through a lot,” Wax said, eyes ahead. “We’ll get her home and give her some physicians to talk to. She’ll mend.”

Wayne nodded. “Course, she won’t fit in wif us anymore if she does.”

They continued, and that fortress, *rusts* it was impressive. Made of broad stone blocks, the type that some poor fellow probably broke his back lugging about, it had steps out front leading up to an enormous statue. At first he was surprised, as all the way out here seemed an odd place for a sculpture—but then, the ones back in Elendel had been shat on by about a million birds, so perhaps this was the *best* place to keep your statue.

The group of them made their way up the steps, fighting the wind. The medallion meant the wind wasn’t cold enough to chill his nethers, but it was still annoying. At the top of the steps they had to walk around that statue, which was in the shape of a fellow in a long coat holding a spear to his side, its tip resting on the stones. Wayne scratched his face, stepping back and craning his neck.

“What’s wrong with his eye?” Wayne asked, pointing.

Marasi stepped up beside him, squinting in the darkness. “A spike,” she said softly. “Like on that coin of Waxillium’s.”

Yup, that was it. One spike, jutting through his right eye. Wayne rounded the statue, which had snow piled about its base.

“One spiked eye,” Wax said, thoughtful. “This place was built by the Lord Ruler. Why would he have them make a statue of him with one eye spiked through?”

“He carries a spear,” Marasi said. “For the one that he used to kill the Survivor?”

“A metal spear,” Wax noted. “But no lines. Aluminum. Looks like some on his belt too. Expensive.”

Marasi nodded. “The Lord Ruler was run through with three spears, by the Lord Mistborn’s testimony. ‘Once stabbed by a beggar, for the poverty he brought. Once stabbed by a worker, for the slavery he enforced. Last stabbed by a prince, for the lords he corrupted.’ The spears didn’t hurt him.”

“Come on,” Telsin called from inside the building, where she’d been joined by Steris.

Wax and the masked fellow moved off, but Wayne kept looking up at the statue.

“So I’ve been thinkin’,” Wayne said as MeLaan passed him.

“Yeah?” she asked, glancing at him.

Rusts. Wax might think it weird, considering she was like a billion years old or something, but it seemed like even *longer* since a woman had looked at him like that. It wasn’t a lusty look or anything like that, it was … what was the word …

Fond.

Yup, that would do.

“Wayne?” she asked.

“Oh, right. Um, well, this place is abandoned, right? So none of the stuff in it belongs to anyone.”

“Well, I’m sure a lot of people would *claim* it,” MeLaan said. “But ownership would be tough to prove.”

“So…”

“So I’d say don’t touch anything anyway,” MeLaan said.

“Oh. Right.”

She smiled at him, then continued on in through the open doorway behind the statue. It was big, gaping, like a fellow’s mouth after you kick ’im right in the canteen.

He looked back at the statue, then poked at the spearhead with his toe. Then he hit it with his heel. Then he hit with a rock. Finally, he twisted it a few times.

It fell right off, clanging to the stone beneath. It had been practically *hanging* free. And Wax was wrong, only the head was of metal—the oversized spear was wood. *Aluminum, you say?* Wayne thought with a smile.

Now, he didn’t care much for what rich folks said was worth money. Unless it was, by itself, worth more than a house. Little Sophi Tarcsel, the inventor, did need more funds.

He wrapped the big spearhead, which was as large as his palm, with a handkerchief to keep it from freezing his fingers off, and started whistling as he jogged after the others. As he passed, he noticed that there once *had* been gates on this doorway, big ones, but they lay in frozen splinters.

The others had gathered inside, where the temple had some kind of entryway. It had murals on either side, just like the ones that the strange kandra chap had shown back in Wax’s mansion. Wayne stepped up to one, beside Wax, who was inspecting it.

Yup. Same mural. One depicting a pair of bracers on a pedestal, the other—across the way—depicting the Lord Ruler wearing them.

“We’ve found the place for certain, then,” Wax said. “The statue was enough evidence, but this seals it. ReLuur was here.”

Together they left the entryway, stepping through its only door into a long, dark hallway. What were those lumps ahead? MeLaan and Steris held their lanterns higher, though nobody seemed to have any inclination to be the first one to proceed.

The masked fellow, though, he was muttering something in funny-talk. He seemed to be following something with his eyes. A metal pattern on the wall? He stepped to the side, and dug the little grenade from his pocket. He did something, opening its side, then used tweezers to extract what looked like a small nugget of metal. He shoved it into a cavity in the wall, then pulled down a lever.

Wayne heard what he thought was distant humming, then a series of small blue lights started glowing on the walls. As was appropriate to match the atmosphere of this rusting place, they were creepier than Steris in the morning. There were no bulbs or anything rational like that, just sections of the walls that seemed to be made of translucent glass that glowed in a downright gloomy way.

It *was* enough to light up the lumps on the floor. Bodies. A right disturbing number of them, lying in awkward positions. And those pools around them … frozen blood.

Wayne whistled softly. “They *really* went far to give this place a creepy look.”

“Those bodies weren’t here originally,” Wax said dryly. “I think they must be— Wayne, what the hell is that?”

“It fell right off,” Wayne said, clutching the spearhead, which was cold to the touch, even through the handkerchief. The tip was peeking out on one side. “I didn’t even look at it, Wax. Musta been loosened by the wind. See, it has a hole on the bottom for screwing off and—”

“Don’t touch anything,” Wax said, pointing at him. “Else.”

MeLaan gave him a look.

“You shut up,” Wayne said to her.

“Didn’t say a word, Wayne.”

“You *implied* one. That’s worse.”

Wax sighed, looking at the pilot fellow, who was inspecting some carvings on the wall. “Allik?” Wax said, then tapped the medallion he’d tied to his wrist.

The masked man sighed, but swapped out one of his medallions for the other. He immediately shivered. “I have now been to hell,” he said. “These mountains will rise all the way there for certain.”

“You think hell is in the *sky*?” Steris asked, standing close to Wax, practically clinging to him.

“Of course it is,” Allik said. “Dig down deep enough in the ground, and things get warm. Hell must be the other way. What did you want of me, Great Metallic Destroyer?”

Wax sighed. “Bodies,” he said, nodding down the hallway. “Traps?”

“Yes,” Allik said. “The ones who built this place were charged with protecting the Sovereign’s weapon. They knew others would eventually follow, and so the builders were bound to make it difficult, knowing that they could not remain to guard in person. Not in this place of ice and death. But…”

“What?” Wax said.

“Those masks,” Allik said.

“The masks of Hunters?” Wax asked.

Allik looked at him, shocked. “How did you recognize them?”

“I didn’t,” Wax said, walking forward carefully. Wayne joined him, as did MeLaan. Wax waved for Marasi, Steris, and Telsin to remain back, though he gestured for Allik to join them.

Together, the four of them walked to the first set of corpses. Wax knelt down beside the pool of frozen blood. The closest fellow had died miserably, with a spike through his chest. Wayne could see the trap now, the tip of it still jutting from the wall. The poor fellow’s mates must have tried to pull him free of the spike, but then had gotten caught in traps themselves.

The masks were different from Allik’s, that was for sure. Made of wood with bits of glass stuck to them, each in a different, odd pattern. And these ones showed the mouth, covering the top half the face, then running down the sides. The skin there, at the sides of the mask, seemed to have *melded* with the wood—though that might be because everything in here was as cold as a spinster’s bedroom.

Wax nudged the mask. “You said the Hunters came to destroy this place.”

“Yes,” Allik said.

“Well, I think they either lied to you, or changed their minds.” Wax nodded toward the busted doors, then down the hallway, littered with bodies. “The lure of the Bands was too powerful for these fellows. I’d guess the dead ones we found near the ship were the ones determined to go through with blowing up the whole place. Got betrayed, but then these betrayers in turn fell to the traps. The ones who returned home; what happened to them? Vanished?”

“Yes,” Allik said, cocking his head. He raised his mask, revealing a wonderfully silly mustache and beard, then regarded Wax with awed eyes. “They went back to the Hunters. Then … gone. Returned to their families, it was said.”

“Executed,” Wax said, rising. “It was discovered they helped murder the rest of their crew, then tried to steal the Bands. They turned back because of the traps killing too many of their fellows, took a skimmer because it was all they could man, and returned with a made-up story of a blizzard. They were going to gather another crew and try again. Their superiors caught them first.”

Allik seemed befuddled. “How … how did you figure that—”

“He does this all the time,” Wayne said. “Best not to encourage him.”

“Just a theory,” Wax said. “One supported by the evidence though. Steris, Telsin. I want you to stay behind while—”

“I’m going with you,” Telsin snapped. She walked forward, cold as the dead blokes on the floor. “I won’t be shoved aside, Waxillium. I won’t be left for our uncle to catch up to us and take me again.”

Wax sighed, looking toward Steris and Marasi.

“I’ll stay,” Steris said. “Someone needs to watch the entrance for Suit and his people.”

Wax nodded, glancing at Wayne. “You keep an eye on her.” Then he looked to Marasi. “You keep an eye on *him*. We’ll come get you if we find anything.”

Marasi nodded. Wayne sighed.

“You intend to go forward?” Allik said, standing up, eyes bulging. “O Great Impetuous One, far be it from me—a lowly pilot—to question your ridiculous intentions, but … seriously? Didn’t you see the *corpses*?”

“I saw them,” Wax said. “MeLaan?”

“On it,” she said, striding forward.

“Great One,” Allik said, “I cannot but think they have traps designed to kill your kind. If they thought of all this, they will have prepared for one such as you.”

“Yes,” Wax said. “That spike was all wood.”

Allik grew more frantic. “Then why would you—”

MeLaan stepped on a pressure plate, causing a spear to launch out of one of the many small holes in the wall. It moved jarringly fast, piercing right through MeLaan’s torso, coming out the other side.

She sighed, looking down. “This is going to absolutely ruin my wardrobe.”

Allik gawked, then lifted his hand as if to raise his mask, only it was already up. He fumbled, unable to take his eyes off MeLaan, who yanked the spear out with a casual gesture.

“Traps,” Wax said, “are somewhat less threatening when you have an immortal along.”

“Unless they have explosives,” MeLaan said. “If I lose a spike, you’d better be ready to stick it right back in. And I was serious—this is going to be *awful* for my clothing.”

“You could do it without,” Wayne said hopefully.

She thought for a moment, then shrugged, reaching to grab her top.

“I’ll buy you new clothing, MeLaan,” Wax said, interrupting her. “We don’t want to make poor Allik fall over dead.”

“Actually,” Allik said, “I don’t think I’d mind.”

“Good man,” Wayne said. “Knew I liked you.”

“Ignore them,” Wax said. “Wayne, help guard the door. Allik, I need you with me, in case something is written in your language.”

The man nodded, then put back down his mask. Made sense why he wore one now. Wayne couldn’t grow a proper beard either, but at least he had the sense to shave.

MeLaan strolled down the hallway. “Telsin, stay behind me,” Wax said, “and step exactly where I step. Same for you, Allik.”

They left Wayne and the two ladies behind. Ahead, a large spiked log swung out of a hidden compartment and *crushed* MeLaan against the wall. She shook it off like a champ, stumbling on down the hallway while her leg re-formed.

“You know,” Wayne said, looking toward Steris and Marasi, “she might be even better at the Blackwatch Doublestomp than I am.”

24

Marasi settled in beside Wayne and Steris, watching the approach to the temple. Distant lanternlight showed Suit's group. But they were getting closer.

What would they do if the man got here? Fight? For how long? Eventually their medallions would run out of heat, and they had almost nothing in the way of supplies.

They'd simply have to count on Waxillium finding the Bands quickly; then they could escape on the skimmer and be away before Suit could do anything. The idea of that infuriating man stuck up here in the snows—having slogged miles and miles to find an empty temple—appealed to her.

At the very least, imagining his reaction distracted her from her own annoyance.

Sit here, Marasi. Stay out of trouble. Babysit Wayne. She knew that wasn't what he meant, but it was still galling.

Rather than sit and simmer in her own petulance, Marasi dug in her purse, pulling out the little spike that belonged to ReLuur. Such a small thing, and so clean—a shining sliver of … pewter, was it? Staring at it in the light of

Steris's lantern, she wished she didn't know its history. A person had been killed to make this, their soul ripped apart so a piece could be used to make a kandra.

Even though it had been done long ago, to someone who would have been centuries dead by now anyway, she felt as if there should be blood beneath her fingers, making the spike slippery. It should not be so clean.

Yet, she thought, *where would mankind be without the kandra, acting as Harmony's hands—guiding and protecting us? Such good to come of something so awful.* Indeed, according to the Historica, without the work the kandra had done through the ages collecting atium, mankind would likely have been destroyed.

The Lord Ruler is the same, Marasi thought. *He was a monster. He created this spike by killing someone. And yet he somehow managed to get to Allik's people and save their entire civilization.*

Waxillium sought justice. He had an open heart—he'd spared Wayne's life all those years ago, after all—but in the end, he sought to uphold the law. That was shortsighted. Marasi wanted to create a world where law enforcement wouldn't be *needed*. Was that why she was so annoyed with him lately?

"You bein' careful with that?" Wayne asked, nodding toward the spike. "You don't want to prick yourself and turn into a kandra."

"I'm pretty sure that's not how it works," Marasi said, tucking it back into her purse.

"Never can tell," Wayne said. "I think I should carry it. Just in case."

"You'd swap it for the first trinket we passed, Wayne."

"No I wouldn't." He paused. "Why? You see somethin' good back there?"

Marasi rose and walked to Steris, who had settled primly on a stone shelf along the wall of the temple's vestibule. She sat in a ladylike posture, knees forward, back straight, writing carefully on a notebook by lanternlight.

"Steris?" Marasi asked.

The woman looked up and blinked. “Ah. Marasi. Perhaps you can help me with a topic. How useless am I?”

“Excuse me?”

“Useless,” Steris said, holding her notebook. Not her little pocket one; her larger one, full-sized, which she’d brought in her pack. She used it for brainstorming lists.

Today, she’d been writing on the back of it. “I’ve been trying to quantify it, for reference purposes,” Steris said. “I am under no illusions as to my position in this group. I am the baggage, the accident. The person who needs to be left with the horses, or sent to stay away from traps. If Lord Waxillium could have sequestered me somewhere safe along the way and left me, he certainly would have.”

Marasi sighed, slumping down on the shelf beside her sister. Was this actually something the two of them could *relate* on? “I know how you feel,” she said. “I spent the first year around him feeling unwelcome, as if Waxillium considered me some little puppy nipping at his heels. And now, when he finally does seem to have accepted me, he treats me as merely a tool to be used or put back on the shelf as required.”

Steris cocked her head at Marasi. “I think you mistake me.”

Of course I do, Marasi thought with resignation. “How?”

“I did not mean to say I *minded* being treated this way,” Steris said. “I was merely stating facts. I am quite useless on this expedition, and I think that is only fair, considering my personal life experience. However, if I wish to improve, I need to know how far I have to go. Here.”

She turned her notebook to show Marasi the back, where she’d been writing. Why use the back? Either way, she’d drawn a small graph with points plotted on it. Usefulness was listed on one axis, and it had names up the other. Rusts—she’d assigned a *number* to everyone’s level of worth on the mission. Waxillium was a hundred, as was MeLaan. Wayne was a seventy-five.

Marasi was an eighty-three. She hadn’t expected that.

"I would say that ten is the threshold below which one's uselessness outweighs the little one does add to the project. I'm thinking I might be a seven, as there are instances where it is better to have me along, though they are few. What do you think?"

"Steris," Marasi said, pushing the notebook aside. "Why do you care about being useful here in the first place?"

"Well, why do you?"

"Because this is who I am," Marasi said. "Who I want to be. But not you—you're perfectly happy sitting in a parlor digging through ledgers. Yet here you are, on the top of a mountain in a blizzard, waiting for a gunfight."

Steris pursed her lips. "I assumed," she eventually said, "that I would be of help to Lord Waxillium at the party, and I was. It was my original understanding that this would be primarily a political enterprise."

Of course. So analytical in everything. Marasi settled back, glancing out the doorway at those approaching lights. Wayne, fortunately, was watching carefully. He acted the fool sometimes, but he took his duties seriously.

"And then," Steris said softly, "perhaps I came along because of the way it feels.…"

Marasi looked sharply back at her sister.

"Like the whole world has been upended," Steris said, looking toward the ceiling. "Like the laws of nature and man no longer hold sway. They're suddenly flexible, like a string given slack. We're the spheres.… I love the idea that I can break out of it all—the expectations, the way I'm regarded, the way I regard myself—and *soar*.

"I saw it in his eyes, first. That hunger, that fire. And then I found it in myself. He's a flame, Waxillium is, and fire can be shared. When I'm out here, when I'm with him, I *burn*, Marasi. It's wonderful."

Marasi's jaw dropped, and she gawked at her sister. Had those words left *Steris's* mouth? Careful, monotonous, *boring* Steris? She glanced toward Marasi and blushed.

"You actually love him, don't you?" Marasi asked.

“Well, love is a *strong* emotion, one that requires careful deliberation to —”

“Steris.”

“Yes.” She looked down at her notebook. “It’s foolish, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is,” Marasi said. “Love is always a foolish emotion. That’s what makes it work.” She found herself reaching over and pulling Steris into a hug with one arm. “I’m happy for you, Steris.”

“And you?” Steris asked. “When will you find someone to make you happy?”

“It’s not about finding someone, Steris. Not for me.”

But what was it about? She gave Steris another hug and, distracted by her own jumble of thoughts, went to check on Wayne.

“What’cha thinkin’ about?” Wayne asked as she joined him beside the outer doorway.

“I just had my long-held assumptions about someone shattered in a brief moment. I’m wondering if every person I pass has similar depths, and if there’s any way to avoid the mistake of judging them so shallowly that I’m rocked when they show their true complexity. You?”

“I was lookin’ at you two,” Wayne said, contemplative as he regarded the snowy landscape outside rather than her, “and wondering. Do sisters ever *really* get sexy with one another for a fellow to watch, or does that only happen in pub songs?”

Marasi let out a long breath. “Thank you for restoring my ability to trust my judgment, Wayne.”

“Anytime.”

“Those lights are still distant,” Marasi said. “You think they got trapped in the snows?”

Wayne shook his head.

Marasi frowned, noting his posture—seeming relaxed, but he’d gotten out one of his dueling canes and rested it across his knees.

“What?” she asked.

“I figure,” Wayne said, “that if *I* knew I’d been spotted, the best way to sneak up would be to leave my lights behind and make it *seem* like I’m goin’ slowly.”

Marasi looked again. She ignored the lights this time, scanning a nearer darkness full of shifting snow. And there, almost to the windswept patch of rock before the temple, she caught movement. Shadows in the shadows.

“Time to call for Waxillium?” Marasi asked.

“I think…” He trailed off, and Marasi pulled her rifle up, nervous.

“What?” she asked.

Wayne pointed to an approaching shadow. It bore a little flag, crossed with an *X*. The symbol for parley.

* * *

Wax pulled on the rope, helping MeLaan climb from the pit. She crawled over the edge, then flopped down. She’d been right about her clothing—it was ragged, pierced in several dozen places, her left trouser leg ripped completely at the thigh.

She’d compacted her body, somehow. Most of her fatty curves had become taut muscles instead, and she’d taken *off* her hair, storing it in the pack Allik carried, leaving her bald.

Wax knelt beside her, glancing down the hallway with its spikes, pits, poison darts, and other strange mechanisms. The entire temple seemed to be one long passage, intended to be as hard to move through as possible.

Something about this is wrong, Wax thought. But what?

MeLaan stirred on the ground.

“Rest a moment,” Wax said, hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t know if we *have* a moment, Ladrian,” she said, sitting up and accepting a canteen of water from the nervous Allik. Telsin stood nearby with arms folded, obviously annoyed at how long this was taking. She kept glancing over her shoulder, as if at any moment she expected to find Suit there to take her again.

“How are your bones?” Wax asked MeLaan.

She held up her left arm—or tried to. It had snapped at the middle of the humerus, and the rest of her arm dangled.

Wax breathed out. "You're sure that doesn't hurt?"

"Turned off the nerves that cause pain," she said. "A trick we've learned over the last centuries. And since my bones are crystal, they can't feel." She grimaced as the arm straightened, the break seeming to heal. But it hadn't, Wax knew—she couldn't make bone, or heal it. "Another patch?"

She nodded. She had stretched ligament along the sides of the break to hold it tight. She'd done that with many of her bones already.

MeLaan moved to rise.

"We can find another way," Wax said, standing. "Break in through one of the walls up ahead, or the roof maybe."

"And how long will that take?"

"Depends on how much we care about what's inside."

"And wouldn't it be silly to come all this way, then *ruin* the Bands of Mourning because of our impatience?"

Wax looked down the hallway. They were most of the way through it, so he put off pushing her further. He could see a door ahead.

"You might not have to do much more anyway," Wax said. "I think I have the pattern figured out."

"What pattern?" MeLaan asked.

"Pressure plate under the second stone to your right," Wax said. "Shoots darts."

She glanced at him, then stepped forward and tapped it with her toe. Darts spat from the wall, passed before her, and bounced against the opposite wall.

"Next one is two stones ahead," Wax said. "There's a hint of a metal line leading underneath it. So far, those have been wall traps."

Another toe press. A portion of the wall opened, dropping a very large spiked log.

"Nice," MeLaan said.

"Last one should be a pit trap," Wax said, joining her in walking around the fallen log. "Check your rope. The stones those are under are raised slightly.”

She tugged on it, using her right hand because the fingers of her left had been crushed. The crystal had broken beyond repair, and she now walked with the hand permanently shut, splinters of bones fused together by tendons.

“I hate the pit ones,” she said. “They just keep going down. Makes me afraid of what might be at the bottom.”

She stepped on the section of floor he indicated, and Wax held tightly to his side of the rope, which was tied about his waist. But instead of a pit trap, the ceiling opened, dropping a block of something. MeLaan jumped back, and the block of strangely colored ice banged to the stones beneath. It was wet, its surface oddly oily-looking.

“What in Harmony’s Rings—” MeLaan said, squatting to inspect the ice.

“Acid, maybe?” Wax said. “It looks like whatever they stored up there was a liquid, but it separated over time, and half froze.”

MeLaan stared at it a long time.

“What?” Wax asked.

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head. “So that’s it?”

“Best as I can tell.” Together, they stepped up before the end of the hallway, at a door made of stone. But there was no handle. The rest of the wall was thick stone as well.

There were some markings carved into the door, if indeed that was what it was. Circles, with symbols in them, inlaid in silver. Wax looked to Allik.

“I don’t recognize any of those,” the pilot said after swapping his metalminds. “If they’re writing, it’s not a language I understand.”

“What do you want to do?” MeLaan asked.

“Let’s get the others,” Wax said, thoughtful. “More brains to solve this will be helpful, and Marasi might recognize those from ReLuur’s notes.”

They started back, letting MeLaan go first again—though Wax kept his eyes open for any indicators of traps. It was still slow going, as she wanted to be careful they’d caught everything.

Telsin fell in beside Wax, glancing once over her shoulder at the door, arms wrapped around herself, though with the medallion she couldn't be cold. Allik trailed behind them, wearing his warming medallion.

"Do you ever wonder, Waxillium," Telsin said softly, "how you got where you are?"

"Sometimes, I suppose," he said. "Though I figure I can trace it. I don't always like it, but it makes sense, if I stop and think it through."

"I can't do the same," she said. "I remember being a child, and assuming the world belonged to me. That I'd be able to seize it when I grew older, accomplish my dreams, become something great. Yet as I've aged, I feel like less and less is under my control. I can't help thinking it shouldn't be that way. How could I have been so in control as a youth, yet often feel so helpless as an adult?"

"That's our uncle's fault," Wax said. "For keeping you captive."

"Yes, and no. Wax, I'm an adult—with greying hair and over half my life behind me. Shouldn't I have a clue as to what this is all about?" She shook her head. "That's not Edwarn's fault. What have we done, Waxillium? We're alone. Our parents are dead. *We're* the adults now, yet where are our children? What's our legacy? What have we accomplished? Don't you ever feel like you never actually grew up? That everyone else did, but you're secretly faking?"

No, he didn't feel that way. But he grunted in agreement anyway—it was good to hear her show a side of herself other than feverish hatred of Suit and his people.

"Is that why you're so keen to come here?" Wax asked. "You think that what we find in there will accomplish something?"

"At least it will help society," Telsin said.

"Unless it destroys society."

"Pushing society forward is no destruction. Even if, in doing so, it leaves us behind."

She withdrew into herself again. He couldn't blame her, after her ordeal. He wished there had been time to go back to Elendel, see her situated in someplace warm and safe, before flying back here.

They retraced their steps, passing the traps they'd already set off. Fallen blocks of stone from the ceiling, darts and spears from the walls, even a stone wall that had dropped to block them, though MeLaan had kept it from falling all the way by slamming a large rock underneath. Wax had been able to wiggle into the space and Push a few coins upward to lift it farther, then they propped it up with rocks in the tracks at the sides. They still had to stoop to go underneath.

They did find two more traps, which they set off as well. Wax found himself increasingly dissatisfied. *So much work*, he thought, noting again the wall section that had fallen in to release scythes that cut the air. That trap had gotten entangled on itself, and so hadn't endangered them at all—but the ingenuity required to put it together was marvelous.

"Allik," he said, prompting the short man to swap back to his Connection medallion. "Why would your people build such an obvious resting place for the Bands? Why make this temple, which proclaims that something precious is inside, then go to the effort of making all these traps? Why not just hide the Bands someplace unassuming, like a cave?"

"They are a challenge, like I said, Thoughtful One," Allik said. "And it was not *my* people who did this, not specifically. The original priests who crafted this place were of no people currently living among us."

"Yes," Wax said, "and you told me the Sovereign left his weapon here with orders to protect it because he was going to return for it. Right?"

"That is the legend."

"These traps don't make sense, then," Wax said, waving back down the hallway. "Wouldn't they have been worried for your king's safety?"

"Simple traps could not affect him, Unobservant Master," Allik said with a laugh. A nervous laugh. He'd glanced at MeLaan again. "The traps are a declaration, and a challenge."

They walked on, but still Wax felt unsatisfied. Allik's explanations made a sort of sense—as much sense as building the temple up in the mountains. It was everything Wax would have expected from such a place, down to the smallest details.

Perhaps that was the problem.

“Wax!” Wayne’s head poked into the corridor before them. They were almost back to the front entryway. “Wax, there you are. Your uncle, mate. He’s here.”

“How close?” Wax asked, speeding up.

“Close, close,” Wayne said. “Like, on our doorstep and demandin’ rent money close.”

He’d hoped to have the Bands before that happened. “We’ll need to try to collapse the entryway,” Wax said as he reached Wayne. “Or maybe this hallway. Seal them out while we finish in here.”

“We could do that,” Wayne said. “Or…”

“Or what?” Wax asked, stopping in place.

“We’ve got him captured,” Wayne said, thumbing over his shoulder. “Marasi has a gun to his rusting head.”

Captured? “Impossible.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said, sounding troubled. “He walked right up to us, carrying a flag. Says he wants to talk. To you.”

25

Wax passed from the temple’s vestibule onto the landing outside. Edwarn Ladrian, his uncle, stood at the top of the steps, just beneath the statue of the Lord Ruler. Wax was accustomed to seeing this man in a sensible suit, surrounded by luxury—so it was somehow both strange and satisfying at the same time to find Edwarn in a thick coat, hood up, fur brushing cheeks red with the cold. His beard was stuck with snow, and he smiled at Wax, gloved hands resting atop an ivory walking stick.

Marasi knelt in the doorway, her rifle trained directly on him. Edwarn stood alone, though his people—at least a hundred, perhaps more—were setting up tents and dumping supplies in piles on the stone approach.

“Waxillium!” Edwarn said. “Speaking out here in the cold would prove unpleasant. Might I join you and yours inside?”

Wax studied the man. What trick was he planning? Edwarn would never place himself solely in Wax’s power, would he?

“You can put the gun down,” Wax said to Marasi. “Thank you.”

She rose, hesitant. Wax nodded to Edwarn, who cheerily walked through the doorway. Edwarn was a stout man, plump and round-faced. As Wax stepped into the doorway after him, Edwarn pulled off his gloves and put down his hood, revealing a head of hair that was more silver than black. He removed his parka; beneath it he wore stout trousers, suspenders, and a thick white shirt. However, as he folded the parka over his arm, his cheeks returned to a normal color and he stopped shivering.

"You *do* know what the medallions do," Wax said.

"Certainly," Edwarn said. "But their reserves of heat are not eternal, and we don't know how to refill them. We had to reserve their use for those who were suffering greatly from the cold during our trip." He glanced toward Allik, who had moved up beside Marasi, taking her arm in one hand and staring death at Edwarn.

Telsin, Wax thought, seeking the woman out. If she shot their uncle as she had that man in the warehouse …

She stood all the way across the vestibule, just outside of it, in the hallway with the traps. Wayne had wisely sauntered over and stood nearby, back to the doorway. He nodded lazily to Wax. He was watching her.

"I see you stole one of my savages," Edwarn said, gesturing at Allik. "He taught you to use the medallions? Both heat and weightlessness?"

Wax pursed his lips and didn't reply.

"No need to act stupid, Nephew," Edwarn said. "We could judge their nature from the type of metals involved, of course. It is a pity we didn't discover the smaller flying machines hidden in the large one. That would have made my trip so much easier."

"Why did you come here, Uncle?" Wax demanded, stepping out of the doorway and casually putting his back to the wall, in case there was a sharpshooter outside. He noticed, impressed, that Marasi had done the same.

"Why did I come? For the same reason as you, Nephew. To find a weapon."

"I meant," Wax said, "why did you come in here, to be taken by me. You're giving yourself up?"

"Giving myself— Nephew, I came to *negotiate*."

“I have no need to negotiate,” Wax said. “I have you now. You’re under arrest for treason, murder, and kidnapping. Allik will stand witness against you.”

“The savage?” Edwarn said, amused.

“I also have—”

Edwarn rapped his cane on the stones. It was banded in metal. Foolish; Wax could use that against him.

“No need, no need,” Edwarn said. “I am *not* in your custody, Nephew. Stop entertaining this fantastical delusion that you can achieve anything by harassing me. Even if you *were* to somehow drag me back to Elendel and throw me in a cage, I’d be released in days.”

“We’ll see,” Wax said. He raised Vindication, pointing it right at Edwarn’s head. “Run. Give me an excuse, Uncle. I dare you.”

“So dramatic,” Edwarn said. “Did they teach you that in the Roughs, then?” He shook his head. “Have you looked outside? I have *twenty* Allomancers and Feruchemists here, son. All well trained, and all ready to kill. You’re in *my* custody, if anything.”

Wax cocked Vindication. “Lucky that I’ve got you, then.”

“I am not so important to the Set as all that,” Edwarn said with a smile. “Don’t think they wouldn’t shoot through me to get to you. But it won’t come to that. You won’t use me as a hostage. What would there be for you to gain? We’ve already dug out your little flying ship. You aren’t getting out of here alive. Not unless I order it.”

Wax clenched his jaw as Edwarn walked to the side of the entryway and settled down on a stone shelf there. He fished in his pocket and brought out a pipe, then nodded in greeting toward Steris, who had been seated on the shelf but immediately moved away.

“Could I borrow that lantern?” Edwarn asked.

Steris held out the lantern. He stuck a lighting stick into it, then used that in turn to light his pipe. He puffed at it a few times, then leaned back, smiling pleasantly. “So?”

“What do you want from me?” Wax said.

“To accompany you,” Edwarn said. He nodded toward the hallway beyond. “Our interrogation of the savages—now that we’ve been able to force them to speak properly—indicates that there is a hallway full of traps beyond here. And…” Edwarn hesitated. “Ahh, so you’ve been *through* the traps, have you? Then you know about the door?”

“How do *you* know this?” Allik said, stepping forward, fists clenched. Marasi put a warning hand on his shoulder, holding him back. “What have you done to my crewmates?”

“You’ve made yours talk too, I see,” Edwarn said. “A pity the Lord Ruler gave his fantastic knowledge to them, don’t you think? Barely men. They must hide their—”

“How do you know?” Allik continued, speaking more loudly. “About the hallway? About the door?”

“Your captain knew many things you did not, I believe,” Suit said. “Did she tell you about the group of Hunters she carried as subcaptain in her youth? How she got them drinking, and listened to their secrets? They were planning to return here, she said, for the prize.”

“My captain,” Allik said, voice strained. “She lives?”

Suit smiled, puffing on his pipe, then turned to Wax. “I can get you through the door. I have the key, passed from the lips of a dying priest, to a doomed Hunter, to an airship captain, and now at last to me.” He spread his hands, smoking pipe in one.

“You’re trying to trick me,” Wax said, narrowing his eyes.

“Of course I am,” Suit said. “The question is, can you best me? Without an accommodation, we are at an impasse. My men outside can’t get in here. It’s too fortified a position, and we can’t risk explosives lest we damage the prize. You, however, can’t get *out*. You can’t get the Bands without my help, but you can’t pass my army of Allomancers either. You’ll starve in here.”

Wax ground his teeth. Rusts, he hated this man. Edwarn … Suit … he was the infection that ate at the wounds of noble society. Spreading his disease. Bringing fever. He was the very definition of the games Wax hated.

“Waxillium,” Telsin said from the doorway. “Don’t trust him. He’ll trick you. He’ll win. He always wins.”

“We’ll try it your way, Uncle,” Wax said reluctantly. “I’ll let you open the door, but then you must return here.”

Edwarn sniffed. “I get to go inside, past the door, and see what is there. Otherwise, you will get no help from me.”

“You’ll be under guard. I’ll have a gun to your head.”

“I have no objection to this.” He puffed on his pipe, held the smoke in his mouth, then let it out between the teeth of his smile.

Wax gave his uncle a thorough frisk. He had no Allomantically reactive metal on his body save for that on his cane, but he didn’t have any aluminum either. At least not in a large enough concentration to be dangerous.

“You first,” Wax said, waving his gun toward the doorway. He ignored Telsin’s glare. Wayne stood up and held her to the side as Edwarn sauntered through, trailing pipe smoke. Marasi fell in beside Wax as he followed, gripping her rifle with white knuckles. Allik, Steris, and MeLaan came next. Wayne and Telsin took the rear, keeping Wax’s sister as far from Uncle Edwarn as possible.

“You sure about this?” Marasi asked as they passed rubble, strewn spears, and darts.

Wax didn’t answer. He thought furiously about what his uncle could be planning. What had Wax missed? He had several theories by the time they reached the door.

Edwarn stood before it, looking the symbols up and down. “Push on that one,” he said, pointing toward one of the engraved circles. “With Allomancy.”

Wax cleared everyone back save Wayne. The shorter man nodded, wearing the bracelet that would let him heal great amounts, speed bubble at the ready in case somehow Edwarn planned the activation of the door to be a trap.

Wax Pushed. Something clicked.

“Now there,” Edwarn said, pointing. “The one with the triangular shape.”

Click.

“Finally this one,” Edwarn said, tapping one with the back of his hand.

“That’s it?” Wax said.

“Get them wrong and the thing freezes shut, I’m told,” Edwarn said idly. “It has a clockwork timer. Won’t be ready again for ten years. You could spend a lifetime guessing, and still have only a small chance of opening it.” He looked at Wax and smiled. “Apparently these symbols spell out something the Lord Ruler would have understood.”

Wax glanced back at Allik, who shook his head, baffled. “They really make no sense to me.”

Wax turned around, held his breath, and Pushed on the final symbol. It clicked. Then, with a deep scrape of stone on metal, the entire thing *slid* to the side, opening a path. Edwarn stepped toward it, but Wax leveled his gun, causing the man to hesitate.

“I’ll have you know,” Edwarn said, “that I worked a very long time to find what was in this place. It seems unfitting that another should pass that door before me.”

“Tough,” Wax said, grabbing Telsin’s shoulder as she tried to slip by him and enter. “MeLaan?”

“Right,” the kandra said. Rusts, she limped as she passed through the door. One of her legs was longer than the other, because of the breaks. She said she didn’t feel pain, but if she chose to lie to him, he’d never know.

She stepped into the other room, which had a soft blue glow coming from it. More of those glass lights in the walls.

“Nothing hit me on the way in,” she said from within. “Want me to walk around a bit?”

“Just around the doorway area,” Wax called to her, gun still held on Edwarn. “Make sure it’s safe for us.”

They waited a tense few moments. No traps activated in the other room that he could hear.

“How can you wait?” Telsin asked. “Knowing what could be back there? A wonder beyond understanding.”

"It isn't going anywhere."

"You never want to know what's beyond the door," Telsin whispered. "You never did chase the horizon. Where is your curiosity?"

"It's alive and well. The things I'm curious about are simply different from the ones you find exciting."

"All clear," MeLaan said from the other room.

Wax nodded for the others to go first, everyone but him and Edwarn. "Stay near the door," he told them.

Once they were inside, he stepped closer to his uncle.

"Threatening," Edwarn said, looking him up and down. "You separated us from the others, Waxillium. Planning a little intimidation?"

"I care for the people in that room," Wax said softly. "I suspect more than a monster like you can ever know."

"You think me emotionless?" Edwarn said, his voice stern. "I tried to spare *your* life, Waxillium. I argued before the Set on your behalf. There was a time when I loved you like a son."

Wax raised Vindication again.

"When we're done with this," Wax said, "you're going to give me names. The others in the Set. I'm going to drag you back to Elendel, and there you'll talk."

"And you'd brutalize me to get those names, no doubt," Edwarn said.

"I follow the law."

"Which can be changed—or bent—to suit your needs. You call me a monster; you hate me because I seek rule. And yet you serve those who do the very same things as I. Your senate? It strangles the life from children with its economic policies." Edwarn stepped forward, a motion which put the barrel of Wax's gun right at his temple. "The longer you live, Waxillium, the more you'll know I am right. The difference between *good* and *evil* men is not found in the acts they are willing to commit—but merely in what *name* they are willing to commit them in."

"Waxillium?" Marasi appeared at the stone doorway. "You'll want to see this."

Wax ground his teeth together and felt his eye twitching. He pulled the gun away from his uncle’s head and waved it toward the door.

Edwarn sauntered in, pipe trailing smoke. Wax followed, and entered the solitary room at the center of the fortresslike temple. The dais here was the one depicted in the mural at the temple’s entrance. It rose from the center of the room, gilded and slender, with steps leading up to it. On it was a small square pedestal topped with red velvet and a golden rack suitable for the display of a precious relic. A soft white light, not blue like those at the sides of the room, shone from above the dais and illuminated the whole thing.

The whole empty thing.

Shattered glass lay on the floor of the dais. Wax could pick out corners; it was the remains of a glass box that had once topped the pedestal, enshrouding what had lain there.

The room was quiet and still, frost on the floor in places, dust disturbed by the opening of the stone door floating in the air. There were no other doors or openings in the walls.

“Gone,” Wax whispered. “Someone beat us here.”

26

“Why’s everyone looking at me?” Wayne said.

“Natural reaction,” Marasi said. She held a gun on Edwarn, as did MeLaan.

Wax carefully picked his way across the floor. *Looks like a throne room,* he thought absently. The others started to follow, and he held them back with an upraised hand.

“Stay in this center row walking toward the dais,” he ordered them, not looking. “There’s a pit trap on either side, and that slightly depressed square over there? It’ll drop a sharpened blade from the ceiling.”

“How does he know that?” Steris asked. She clutched her notebook, within which she made lists.

“Wax has a natural affinity for things what kill people,” Wayne said. “You’re all still lookin’ at me. Rusts, you think I somehow got in here and lifted the rusting thing?”

“No,” Marasi admitted. “But someone did. ReLuur the kandra?”

“No,” Wax said, crouching and picking among the pieces of glass on the steps leading up to the pedestal. “These have been here a long time, judging by the dust.”

There was no way the kandra had gone down that corridor outside. Too many traps were left, and all the ones that had been sprung had bodies near them.

It was likely that the kandra had snapped his pictures and wisely returned home to gather more of his kind and mount a proper expedition. Kandra were immortal; he wouldn’t be hasty in trying to get in here. He’d have planned to take years studying the temple and extracting its secrets.

Who, then?

Telsin passed him, stepping to the dais. Glass crunched under her feet, and Wax glanced up to see her staring at the empty pedestal, aghast. “How?” she murmured.

MeLaan shook her head. “What would *you* do, if you’d secretly stolen the thing? Leave the place gaping open to let everyone know, or reset the traps and sneak away?”

No, Wax thought. Reset the traps? Unlikely. He glanced at his uncle, who stood with pipe in hand, staring at the dais with bristling anger. He was surprised by this.

Or was that an act? Was this all a setup, after taking the Bands, to throw Wax off? Wax brushed the dust from a piece of glass, then dropped it and selected a larger chunk, one of the corner pieces. Wax eyed it critically, then took another piece and set it alongside.

“This *is* a disappointment,” Edwarn said. He seemed genuinely troubled.

This wasn’t him, Wax thought, stretching out one of his mistcoat tassels and using it judge the length of the shard of glass. *No, this goes back way further than that.…*

He stood up, the arguments of the others becoming a distant buzz to him as he regarded the supposed resting place of the Bands of Mourning. A small velvet-topped pedestal, frozen in time.

“I guess that is that,” Edwarn said. “Time for this to end, then.”

Wax spun, whipping out his gun. He pointed it not at Edwarn, but at his sister.

She stared him down, hand at her pocket. Then she slowly removed a gun. Where had she gotten that? He couldn't sense it. Aluminum.

"Telsin," Wax said, voice hoarse.

Edwarn wouldn't have come in here without a mole. She made the most sense. But *rusts.*

"I'm sorry, Waxillium," she said.

"Don't do this." He hesitated. Too long. She raised the gun.

He fired. She did the same. His shot swerved away from her, Pushed by Allomancy. But her shot—aluminum—took him just below the neck.

* * *

Marasi moved before she had time to think. Her rifle already in position, she shot at Suit. Whatever was happening, having him dead couldn't hurt.

Unfortunately, her bullet veered as well, missing Edwarn. Then her weapon flew backward from her hands. Suit smiled at her with infuriating unconcern.

At the pedestal, Waxillium stumbled back. He'd been hit right where the collarbone met his neck. He tried to remain on his feet, but Telsin shot him a *second* time, in the abdomen. Waxillium collapsed, rolled down the steps to the base of the dais, and groaned.

Edwarn was an Allomancer.

Telsin was in the Set.

Again, Marasi reacted before she knew what she was doing. Wayne leaped for Suit, but Suit took a hit from the dueling canes without flinching, then used his own cane—which was banded in metal—and Pushed it against Wayne.

Wayne was flung toward Marasi, canes clattering to the floor. He grunted, hitting the ground as Marasi tried to leap for Suit. Perhaps if she caught just him in a bubble with her, Wayne could—

Her metal reserves were gone. Wayne stumbled up behind her, looking similarly confused. Telsin had tossed something between the two of them.

A small metal cube. Another Allomantic grenade. She was an Allomancer too. She tossed a bag of something to Suit. Coins.

Wayne recovered from his surprise, leaping toward Edwarn again. But the man Pushed a handful of coins. Wayne cursed, flinching in midair as the coins ripped through his body. Marasi watched in horror, and nearby someone screamed.

Shock. No. She wouldn’t let herself be stunned. She hurled herself at Suit, though he casually shoved her aside. She briefly caught hold of his shirt as she fell, but then her fingers slipped. Her head knocked against the stones as she hit.

Dazed, she was able to see Waxillium stumble to his feet. He lurched, bleeding, as Telsin fired again. Then he charged: but not for the doorway, or for Suit. He scrambled toward the side of the room, away from everything. The only thing in that direction was a corner, surely trapping him—

The floor dropped, plunging Waxillium into the pit.

Nearby, Wayne climbed to his feet.

“Keep him down!” Suit shouted, launching coins at Wayne.

Telsin, atop the dais, fired on Wayne. She wasn’t a terribly good shot, but between her and Edwarn, they managed to hit several times.

That didn’t drop him, not with the gold metalmind. He made a rude gesture and ran out the door, healing from the wounds almost as soon as he was hit.

Suit growled as Telsin’s weapon clicked, out of bullets. Marasi tried to grab Suit by the legs and maybe trip him, but he kicked her in the chest. She grunted, breath knocked out of her, and Suit put his foot against her throat.

“Wayne!” Suit yelled. “Come back or I’ll kill the others!”

No reply. Wayne, it seemed, had taken the chance to escape down the hallway outside. Good. He wasn’t abandoning them; he had correctly realized that their chances were best if he escaped.

“I’ll do it!” Suit yelled. “I’ll kill her!”

“You think he cares about that?” Telsin asked.

"Honestly, I can't tell with that one," Suit said. He waited a moment to see if Wayne replied, then sighed, taking his foot off Marasi's neck.

Dazed, still having trouble breathing, she took stock of the situation. MeLaan was writhing on the floor. When had that happened? Allik and Steris stood frozen with wide eyes. This had all taken place in a flash. A few years back, Marasi would have been like those two, stunned and confused. She was impressed, on one level, that she'd been able to react as quickly as she had.

Her growth hadn't been enough. Edwarn picked up her rifle, sighting it on her. "Over you go," he said, gesturing with the gun for Marasi to crawl to Steris and Allik so he could cover them all at once. She considered trying something, but what? Her metal reserves were gone, and the import of what had just transpired was settling upon her.

Waxillium was maybe bleeding to death at the bottom of that pit. Wayne had escaped, but had no bendalloy. MeLaan was down.

She might have to do something about this herself.

"Please," Allik said, frantically grabbing Marasi by the arm as she joined the other two. "Please."

He was panicked, but she couldn't blame him. He'd seen Waxillium—the man he worshipped—fall, and was once again in Suit's hands. Steris narrowed her eyes at Telsin.

Waxillium had seen the truth, but too slowly. He hadn't searched her, and he'd hesitated instead of firing. For all his cleverness, Waxillium had a hole in his judgment regarding Suit and Telsin. He always had.

Not that you did any better, Marasi thought.

Telsin walked calmly down the steps, holding her handgun before herself. "That was bungled."

"Bungled?" Edwarn said. "I thought it went well."

"I let Waxillium escape."

"You shot him thrice," Edwarn said. "He's as good as dead."

"And you're going to trust that?" Telsin asked.

Edwarn sighed. "No."

Telsin nodded, her expression calm as she slid a knife from her pocket, then knelt and plunged it into MeLaan. Steris cried out, stepping toward them.

“What did you do to her?” Marasi asked.

They didn’t answer, but Marasi suspected the truth. There were liquids that, when injected into kandra, immobilized them and made them start to lose their shapes. It was temporary, but Marasi could only guess that while she had been focused on Suit, Telsin had somehow used one of those on MeLaan. With her arms twisted, her legs broken, the kandra’s skeleton hadn’t been in any shape for her to fight.

Telsin worked for a gruesome moment and came out with a spike. She tucked it into her pocket, then kept working. Suit walked over to Marasi, and through his ripped shirt Marasi caught a glint of metal peeking between two of his ribs. Not a large spike like the one Ironeyes had. Something more subtle.

They hadn’t just been experimenting with Hemalurgy—they’d used spikes to grant themselves powers.

Telsin finally got the second spike out of poor MeLaan and pocketed it. The kandra melted, a mess of greenish-brown flesh and muscles without anything to cling to—oozing out of her clothing, leaving her bones and her skull of green crystal to gaze vacantly at the ceiling.

Telsin pointed toward the pit Waxillium had fallen into. “Chase him down.”

“Me?” Suit said. “Surely we can wait for—”

“No waiting,” Telsin said. “You know him best. You hunt him down. He is still alive. I’ve met rocks less durable than my brother.”

Suit sighed again, but nodded this time, swapping guns with Telsin so he’d have the aluminum pistol, then reloading it. He walked toward the pit. Marasi glanced at Telsin, who watched MeLaan’s remains but held the rifle at the ready.

Should Marasi charge her? Suit obeyed *her*. She wasn’t simply a member of the Set; she outranked Waxillium’s uncle. And she was obviously an

Allomancer; the way she'd used the Allomantic grenade proved that.

Suit climbed down, using a rope. Shortly after that, Marasi heard footsteps outside, and soon an array of soldiers in uniforms like those from the warehouse piled in.

"The short one," Telsin said, urgent. "Wayne. Did you pass him?"

"Sir?" one of the soldiers asked. "No, we haven't seen him."

"Damn," Telsin said. "Where did that rat get to? I need as many men as we can get scouring that hallway and the plain outside. He's *extremely* dangerous, particularly if he has another vial of bendalloy."

Marasi turned to Steris, who was still dazed, eyes wide, still looking at the hole where Waxillium had fallen. Allik held Marasi's arm, his eyes visible behind his mask.

"I'll get us out of this," she whispered to them.

Somehow.

27

He'll tell on us.… You know he will.

Wax rolled onto his back, staring upward. Darkness. The pit had twisted during the fall—he remembered ramming into one of its curves—and deposited him here.

Rusts … how could his vision swim when he couldn't *see* anything? He fumbled at his gunbelt and came up with a vial, which he managed to down, replenishing his metal reserves.

You coming? Of course you're not. You never want to risk trouble.

No. He *could* see something. A lone candle in a black room. He blinked his eyes, but it was gone. A vision of the past. A memory …

Light in a dark room. Set there to distract …

That was what the dais up above had been. The Bands had *never* been there. The people who had built the place left the broken glass, the empty rack, the dais and the pedestal—all as a ruse. But they'd made a mistake.

The glass box they'd broken had been too large to fit on the pedestal.

Candle in a dark room … Wax thought. That meant the Bands were somewhere else. He blinked, and thought—as his eyes adjusted—he actually could pick out light.

He wasn’t in a narrow pit. That hole had dumped him out somewhere. He heaved himself over in a twist, coming to his knees, and felt at his gut. Blood there. A bad hit, all the way through, judging by the wetness he felt trickling down the back of his thigh. He’d taken a shot to the leg too, but that didn’t matter. He’d broken that leg in his fall anyway.

The shot near his neck was the worst. He knew this without even touching it, knew it by the way his body worked—by the way pieces of him were growing numb, the way certain muscles didn’t respond right.

That light. A soft blue. Not a candle, but one of the built-in lights of the building. He crawled toward the light, dragging his broken leg, scraping on stone, sweat streaming down the sides of his face and mixing with the blood he spilled to the ground.

“Harmony,” he whispered. “Harmony.”

No reply. Now he prayed? What of his hatred?

For a time, that light was everything to him. An hour could have passed as he crawled, or perhaps it had been only a minute. As he neared, he saw sentries in the darkness. People sitting arrayed before the light, casting long shadows into the depths of the room. The ceiling was low, barely taller than a man could stand. That was why … why the people had to sit.…

Focus! he thought at himself, flaring his metal. The sentries had metal on them. And … yes, one other faint line, pointing toward a spot on the floor up ahead. Another trap.

The flared metal seemed to bring him clarity, helping him push back the muddled sensation. Blood loss. He was fading quickly. Still, a shade more alert, he saw those sentries for what they were. Corpses. Seated, somehow, draped in warm clothing. He passed the first row of them and looked in on frozen faces, shriveled with the passing of time but remarkably well preserved. Each held a mask in its lap. They sat in four concentric rings, looking at the light up ahead.

Here, the ones who had built this place had died. Then how … how had word of the key to the door been passed on.…

Wax crawled among the huddled dead, frozen despite their warm clothing. He could imagine them seated here, waiting for the end, as the heat in their metalminds dwindled. The cold, creeping in as night does after sunset, a final, consuming darkness.

And ahead, another pedestal. Smaller, carved of white rock. A simple light glowing on its top revealed a set of metal bracers. No fancy trimmings here, just the silent reverence of the dead.

Something sounded behind him, a scrape of boots on stone; then a light flooded the room from there.

“Waxillium?” Edwarn’s voice called.

Wax huddled down.

“I know you’re here, son,” Edwarn said. “That’s quite the trail of blood you’re leaving. This is over, as you must realize.”

He’s an Allomancer now, Wax thought, remembering what Edwarn had done to Marasi’s gun. The man carried a pistol, the aluminum one that Telsin had used.

Telsin … How long had she been working with them? He hated that he’d guessed, hated that his first instinct—even if he’d been right—had been to pull a gun on his only sibling. It just made too much sense. She’d caused Wayne to knock the backpack out the door. She’d killed the brute in the warehouse, when he’d been about to speak—potentially addressing her, outing her as a member of the Set.

Suit wouldn’t … wouldn’t have come into the temple with them unless he had the upper hand.…

He needed to stay focused. Edwarn was approaching. Wax was tempted to Push a bullet toward the man, but held himself back. Edwarn raised the light, illuminating the vast emptiness and looking slowly around himself. He didn’t seem to have spotted Wax, and the bodies all had some metal on them, so Edwarn’s steelsight wouldn’t reveal Wax. But the blood trail would soon betray him.

Still, Wax waited. He bowed himself, huddling down in the line of figures, imitating their stooped postures.

Have to get those bracers …

He’d get shot before he could reach them. If he could even make it that distance without passing out.

“I *did* try to protect you,” Suit said.

“What did you do to my sister?” Wax demanded, his voice echoing in the darkness.

Suit smiled, walking forward, scanning the bodies. If he could draw the man closer …

“I didn’t do anything to her,” Suit said. “Son, *she* recruited *me*.”

“Lies,” Wax hissed.

“The old world is dying, Waxillium!” Edwarn said. “I told you that a new one will soon be born, a world where men like you don’t belong.”

“I can find my place in a world of airships.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” Suit said. “I’m talking about the secrets, Waxillium. The world where constables exist only to make people feel secure. It will be a world of shadows, of hidden government. The shift is already happening. Those who rule these days are not the men who smile at crowds and make speeches.”

Edwarn moved around a corpse, then followed Wax’s blood trail with his eyes. Only a few more steps.

“The day of kings has passed,” Edwarn said. “The day of mighty men to be worshiped has gone, and with its passing goes the right of Allomancers to power. No more will their gifts hinge on the whims of fate. Instead, the powers will come to those who deserve them. Who can *use* them.”

He raised his foot to step, then hesitated, looking down. He grinned, moving his foot backward and making Wax’s heart fall. “Trying to goad me into stepping onto the trap? Such a brash plan, Waxillium.” He glanced upward. “Looks like it’s rigged to drop this entire section of ceiling. You’d be caught in it too.”

Edwarn turned and looked right at where Wax was sitting, trying to hide among the corpses.

Wax raised his head. “It would have been worth the cost.” He still had his shotgun, but doubted he had the strength to use it. Instead, kneeling, he held out a single bloodied hand, clutching a bullet in it. “Shall we see how good you are, Uncle?”

A duel. Perhaps he could win a duel.

Edwarn regarded him, then shook his head. “I think not.”

He stepped on the pressure plate, triggering the trap.

* * *

Telsin marched Marasi and the others out of the temple. And, once they were outside, Telsin reached to Marasi’s arm and ripped free the medallion there.

Marasi gasped, clutching her purse as the cold descended upon her like a swarm of insects, nipping at every bit of exposed skin. Her dress suddenly seemed flimsy, useless. She might as well have been naked. Telsin repeated the process for Steris, then reached for Allik’s arm.

“Please,” Marasi said. “He—”

Telsin grabbed the medallion. Allik tried to pull away, but one of the guards cuffed him across the face, cracking his mask and sending him to the snowy ground. The guard reached down, ripping off the medallion.

Allik gasped loudly, huddling on the cold stone. Beyond them, the field was a flurry of activity. Tents flapped in the wind, and men scurried around the fallen Hunter airship. A group of people in masks were being marched across the field to a particularly large tent—so, Allik’s crewmates were still alive.

One man with a red uniform beneath his thick coat hiked up the steps. “Lady Sequence,” he said to Telsin as he reached the top. “We’ve located what we think must be the weapon.”

“The Bands?” Marasi asked.

Telsin looked at her drolly. “The Bands were a possibility. An engaging one, yes, and I will not deny my disappointment. Irich will be particularly displeased. But we didn’t come here for them.”

The airship, Marasi realized, looking toward it. *Bearing a bomb intended to destroy the temple.*

A bomb that had never been used. Men moved about the large airship, investigating it. *This* was what Suit and the others had come for.

Marasi stepped forward, but one of the guards grabbed her while another dug in her purse to check for anything dangerous. Another batted Steris's notebook from her fingers, then began to frisk Steris none too gently.

"The ship is in good repair despite the elements, Sequence," the soldier told Telsin as Marasi watched helplessly. "It didn't crash as the other one did."

"Excellent," Telsin said. "Let's see if that thing has any of the powering metal left in it." She started down the steps, her warming medallion letting her ignore the freezing cold. She seemed like a spirit in her sleek, airy gown beside men in full winter gear. She hesitated, looking back at Marasi and the others.

"Search them thoroughly," she informed the men. "I sensed faint metal from the older woman, but it's gone now. Her notebook must have metal bindings. I don't believe that they have any aluminum guns—besides the one that Waxillium had. Either way, keep watch on them. They're insurance against the short one, who is still out here somewhere."

* * *

The roof fell in on them.

Wax shouted, diving toward the pedestal and the two simple bracers. Suit took a different tack; he Pushed himself back away from the bracers, out of the path of the stones.

Rock hit Wax like a fist slamming him to the ground. Bones crunched inside of him. He gasped, but got a mouthful of dust.

He knew how bad it was when the pain faded. As the dust settled, he found he couldn't move any part of his body. A weight rested on his back, pinning him with his head to the side. One of his hands hung within his view, the fingers mangled. He couldn’t feel them. Nothing. Just his face. Enough to feel the tears of pain and failure on his cheeks.

Steel. He tried burning it.

He felt a few wisps of it inside of him, a warmth that became the only thing he could sense.

Rubble shifted nearby, and rocks clattered. A second later Suit appeared, a cut in his arm resealing. He dusted himself off and glanced at Wax.

“The trouble with Hemalurgy is in its limitations,” he said. “If you kill a man and steal his Metallic abilities, the resulting gift to you is weakened. Did you know that? What’s more, if you spike yourself too much, you become subject to Harmony’s … interference. Indeed, by the stories, you might open yourself to the interference of any idiot Soother or Rioter with enough talent.” He shook his head. “I am limited to three boons, even if we have discovered how to make someone else be weak, while we gain the benefit.”

He glanced toward the bracers. “But if there is a way to gain more powers, and not be subject to Harmony … now that would be something. I see why Telsin was so eager.”

He left Wax, passing the frozen corpses of the dead masked ones, bits of them sticking from beneath fallen rocks. Crushed. Some even looked to have shattered.

Suit stepped up to the pedestal. “Behold me, Waxillium. Today, I become a god.”

Wax tried to cry out, but his lungs wouldn’t hold enough air. He tried to heave himself free, but his body no longer worked. He was dying. Though steel burned fitfully inside of him, he was dying.

No. He was already dead. His body just hadn’t quite realized it yet.

Suit held the Bands. Wax twisted his head as best he could, pinned as he was, to see it. The bearded man smiled broadly, waiting.

Nothing happened.

Suit strained, his face darkening. Then he turned the bracers around, looking them over. He put them on.

Still, nothing happened.

“Drained,” he said with disgust. “After all this, we find them *empty* of attributes. What a waste.” He sighed, then walked over to Wax, sliding the aluminum gun from his pocket. “I have no doubt that Irich’s scientists will be able to puzzle out how the Bands were made. Take that thought with you into the eternities, Waxillium. Be sure to shake Ironeyes’s hand for me. I intend to never meet him.”

He pressed the gun against Wax’s head.

And then something slammed into Suit. The man cried out, and a scuffle followed, along with the gun discharging. Suit cursing. Feet on stone.

A second later, Wayne scrambled into view. He knelt beside Wax and looked him over, seeming horrified.

“Wayne,” Wax croaked. “How…?”

“Ah, ’s nothing,” his partner said. “Slipped out and fell down another of those holes. That one ended in spikes, I’m afraid. But I was able to heal up and climb out, once the soldiers had passed, then slip into this pit. You picked a better hole to fall in than I did, for sure.”

“Suit…”

“He ran,” Wayne said. “Didn’t want to face me himself, not with me healing. Right cowardly, that one.…” He trailed off, looking down at Wax’s body, pinned by the rock. “I—”

“Find Steris and Marasi,” Wax croaked. “Help them escape.”

“Wax,” he said, shaking his head. “No. *No*. I can’t do this without you.”

“Yes you can. Fight.”

“Not that part,” Wayne said. “The rest of it. Livin’. We … we’ll get you out of this.” He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms, then looked at the stone on top of Wax, then down at the blood pooling beneath.

Then he sat back, running his hands through his hair, eyes wide, as if in shock. Wax tried to urge him on, but his lips wouldn’t move.

Not enough strength.

* * *

Marasi huddled on the cold ground with Steris and Allik, surrounded by armed men who searched their possessions. It was still night out here, but sunrise had to be close.

Waxillium would have found a way out of this.

Stop comparing yourself to him, she thought. *Is it any wonder you stand in his shadow, when that's all you can see yourself doing?*

She needed to solve this. A dozen plans ran through her head, all stupid. The guard nearby still had her purse.

ReLuur's spike, it might be in there. Since it was Hemalurgically Invested, it might not have registered to the eyes of an Allomancer looking for metals on her. The guard dumped the purse out, spilling the contents onto the cold stone.

No spike. Instead, among her notebooks and handkerchiefs tumbled a palm-sized wedge of metal. The aluminum spearhead from the statue?

Wayne, I'm going to … She gritted her teeth. When had he swapped her for the spike? That man!

"I searched that purse already," another guard noted. "No weapons."

"Well then, what's this?" the first guard said, picking up the wedge-shaped piece of aluminum.

The second guard snorted. "You're welcome to try to kill someone with that if you want. It's dull."

Marasi wilted, feeling stupid. Even if she had the spike, what would she do? She couldn't overpower armed guards.

Then what *could* she do?

Someone fell through the sky and thumped to the ground nearby. She perked up, thinking it must be Waxillium. Instead it was Suit, clothing ripped and dusty, carrying a gun. The guards saluted, the one with her purse dropping it and the metal wedge. One of her glass makeup jars rolled away.

Poor Allik huddled beside Steris. He'd stopped shivering, and his skin was turning blue. Steris met her eyes, and looked resigned.

Suit strode past. He looked far more intimidating dropping through the air using Allomantic abilities than he had bundled up for the weather and standing on the steps of the temple.

“Is my brother dead?” Telsin demanded, turning from her group of engineers nearby.

“Yes,” Suit said. “Though I encountered the short one.”

“You killed him?”

“Left him distracted,” Suit said. “I thought you’d want to see what I found.” He held up something that gleamed in the powerful lights the crew had set up. Two silvery bracers, each as long as a forearm. “There was a hidden chamber down there, Sequence. And my, what a secret it contained.”

Telsin shoved between her scientists and scrambled up to Suit. She took the bracers, awed.

“They don’t work,” Suit noted.

“What do you mean?”

“They’re out of attributes, I think. Their reserves gone.”

“But they grant Allomancy too,” Telsin said, putting them on and waving toward one of the guards, who tossed her a vial of metals. She downed it, eager.

“Well?” Suit asked.

“Nothing.”

A decoy, Marasi thought. Like the glass case and the empty pedestal … yes, that had been one too. She could see now why Waxillium had been doing his measuring.

Waxillium. He couldn’t really be …

No. What could she do? Not fight. But think. These Bands were a decoy. A second layer of falsehood to confuse intruders.

So where were the real ones?

* * *

Candles in a dark room.

They’re another decoy, Wax thought, mind muddled. *Those bracers were too perfect, just like the stories. They were left to fool us.*

Like the symbols of Wax's old adversary, painted on the door of a mansion. Meant to distract. Delay.

This place was made for the Lord Ruler, Wax thought. *Those traps … those traps are stupid. What if one* did *catch him? The whole thing has to be a decoy.*

So what? There was another temple out there? Maybe they *had* hidden it in a cave?

He could barely see anymore. Wayne held his hand, tears streaming down his face. Everything was fading. The cold … coming … like darkness …

No, Wax thought, *it wouldn't be somewhere else. He'd need to be able to find it. He'd recognize it.…*

It was.

It was here!

Wax gasped, and tried to form the words, eyes wide. Wayne gripped his hand, knuckles white.

He couldn't feel it.

The darkness arrived, and Wax died.

28

Wax stilled.

Wayne let the hand fall limp. He wanted to just sit here. Stare at nothing like those fellows in rows nearby, the ones that weren’t crushed. Sit and become nothing.

All his life, only one man had believed in him. Only one man had forgiven him, had encouraged him. The rest of this damned race could burn away and become ash, for all Wayne cared. He hated them all.

But … what would Wax say?

He left me, the bastard, Wayne thought, wiping his eyes. In that moment, he hated Wax too. But then, Wayne loved him more than the hatred. He growled, and stumbled to his feet. He had no weapons; he’d dropped his dueling canes above.

He stared at Wax’s body, then knelt and felt along the man’s leg. He got ahold of something and yanked it free. The shotgun.

Wayne’s hands immediately started shaking.

“You stop that,” he hissed at them. “We’re done with that.”

He cocked the shotgun, then went looking for a way out of this tomb.

* * *

The whole temple is a decoy, Marasi thought, trembling in the cold. *So where are the actual Bands?*

The place was built for the Lord Ruler, who would supposedly return to claim his weapon. Where would you put that weapon?

He'd know what it looked like, Marasi thought. *He built it. We think it was in the shape of bracers, but it didn't have to be. Could be anything.*

That would be smart, if you were making a weapon. These metalminds, you had to know what they did before they worked. You could protect yourself, so only someone who knew what to look for could use your weapon.

And in that case, the people who built the temple could have left the weapon where the returning Lord Ruler would see it, but everyone else would pass right by, digging farther into the temple to encounter traps, pits, and decoys—all designed to either kill them or convince them that they'd successfully robbed the place.

Where did you put the weapon? On the doorstep, under the sign of the Sovereign himself, in his very own hand. Marasi turned, frantic, searching out the oversized spearhead.

It lay right beside her, where the guard had dropped it. Waxillium had called it aluminum because he couldn't sense it, but he hadn't looked closely enough.

If he had, he'd have seen it was made of different interwoven metals, wavy, like the folds forged into the blade of a sword. He couldn't Push on it, not because it was aluminum.

But because it was a metalmind, stored with more power than any they'd ever seen.

* * *

Around Wax, everything became misty and indistinct. The cavern, the rocks, the ground itself—all just mist. He could stand on it somehow.

Harmony stepped up beside Wax in the misty darkness. They fell in beside one another, walking as was natural for men to do. God looked much as Wax had always imagined Him. Tall, peaceful, hands laced before Himself. Face like a long oval, serene and human, though He towed behind Him a cloak of timelessness. Wax could *see* it, trailing after. Storms and winds, clouds and rain, deserts and forests, all reflected somehow in this creature's wake. His robe was the Terris V pattern, where each V was not a color, but an age. A *strata* of time, like those of a deep rock uncovered.

"They say," Wax said softly, "that You come to all people when they die."

"It is a duty I consider to be among my most sacred," Harmony said. "Even with other pressing matters, I find time to take this walk." He had a quiet voice, familiar to Wax. Like that of a forgotten friend.

"I'm dead then."

"Yes," Harmony said. "Your body, mind, and soul have separated. Soon one will return to the earth, another to the cosmere, and the third … Even I do not know."

Wax continued walking. The shadowy cavern vanished, and Wax had a feeling of *blurring*. Mists became darkness, and all he could see was a distant light, like the sun below the horizon.

"If You can take time to walk with us," Wax said, bitter, "why not come a little earlier? Why not *stop* the walk before it must begin?"

"Should I prevent all hardship, Waxillium?"

"I know where this is going," Wax said. "I know what You're going to say. You value choice. Everyone theorizes about it. But You *can* help. You've done it before, in placing me where I needed to go. You intervene. So why not intervene more? Prevent children from being killed. Make certain that constables arrive in time to stop deaths. You don't have to take away choice, but You *could* do more. I know You could."

He left the last part unsaid.

You could have saved her. Or at least told me what I was doing.

Harmony nodded. It felt bizarre to be demanding things, but rusts … if this was the end, Wax wanted a few answers.

“What is it to be God, Waxillium?” Harmony asked.

“I don’t think that’s a question I can answer.”

“It is not one I ever thought I’d have to answer either,” Harmony said. “But obviously, it has been forced upon me. You would have me intervene and stop the murders of innocents. I could do this. I have considered it. If I were to stop every one, what then? Do I stop maimings as well?”

“Of course,” Wax said.

“And where do I hold back, Waxillium? Do I prevent all wounds, or do I prevent only those caused by evil people? Do I stop a man from falling asleep so that he will not tip a candle and burn down his house? Do I stop all harm that could ever befall a person?”

“Maybe.”

“And once nobody is ever hurt,” Harmony said, “will people be satisfied? Will they not pray to me and ask for more? Will some people still curse and spit at the sound of my name because they are poor, while another is rich? Should I mitigate this, make everyone the same, Waxillium?”

“I won’t be caught in this trap,” Wax said. “You’re the God, not me. You can find a line where You prevent the worst. *You* can find a line where You’re stopping the worst that is reasonable, while still letting us live our lives.”

The light ahead suddenly rolled outward, and Wax found that they’d been rounding a *planet*. They stood high above it, and had stepped from darkness into sunlight, which let Wax see the world below, bathed in a calm, cool light.

Beyond that hung a haze of red. All around, pressing in upon the world. He could feel it choking him, a miasma of dread and destruction.

“Perhaps,” Harmony said softly, “I have already done just as you suggest. You do not see it, because the worst never reaches you.”

“What is it?” Wax asked, trying to take in that vast redness. It beat inward, but he could see something, a thin strip of light—like a bubble around the world—stopping it.

“A representation,” Harmony said. “A crude one, perhaps.” He looked to Wax and smiled, like a father at a wide-eyed child.

“We’re not done with our conversation,” Wax said. “You let her die. *You let me kill her*.”

“And how long,” Harmony asked softly, “must you hate yourself for that?”

Wax clenched his jaw, but couldn’t force down the trembling that took him. He lived it again, holding her as she died. Knowing he’d killed her.

That hatred *seethed* inside of him. Hatred for Harmony. Hatred for the world.

And yes. Hatred for himself.

“Why?” Wax asked.

“Because you demanded it of me.”

“No I didn’t!”

“Yes. A part of you did. An eventuality I can see, one of many possible Waxilliums, all you—yet not set. Know yourself, Waxillium. Would you have had another kill her? Someone she didn’t know?”

“No,” he whispered.

“Would you have had her live on, a slave in her mind? Corrupted by that *cursed* spike that would forever leave her scarred, even if replaced?”

“No.” He was crying.

“And if you had known,” Harmony said, holding his eyes, “that you’d never have been able to pull that trigger unless your eyes were veiled? If you’d realized what knowledge of the truth would do to you—stilling your hand and trapping her in an endless prison of madness—what would you have asked of me?”

“Don’t tell me,” Wax whispered, squeezing his eyes shut.

The silence seemed to stretch until eternity.

“I am sorry,” Harmony said with a gentle voice, “for your pain. I am sorry for what you did, what we had to do. But I am not sorry for making you do what had to be done.”

Wax opened his eyes.

“And when I hold back, staying my hand from protecting those below,” Harmony said, “I must do it out of trust in what people can do on their own.” He glanced toward the red haze. “And because I have other problems to occupy me.”

“You didn’t tell me what it was,” Wax said.

“That is because I do not know.”

“That … frightens me.”

Harmony looked to him. “It should.”

Down below, a tiny spark flickered on one of the landmasses. Wax blinked. He’d seen it, despite the incredible distance.

“What was that?” he asked.

Harmony smiled. “Trust.”

* * *

Marasi clutched the spearhead in two hands.

And tapped *everything*.

Power flooded into her, lighting her up like an inferno. Snow hung motionless in the air. She stood up and reached to the belt of one of her captors, removing one of his vials of metal. She took them all, several from each guard, and drank them. She was tapping a metalmind, letting her move at a speed so fast that when she lifted her hand, she could briefly see the pocket of vacuum left behind. She smiled.

Then she burned her metals. All of them.

In that one transcendent moment, she felt herself change, expand. She felt the Lord Ruler’s own power, stored in the Bands of Mourning—the spearhead clutched in her fingers—surge through her, and she felt she would burst. It was as if an ocean of light had suddenly been pumped into her arteries and veins.

Blue lines exploded from her, first pointing at metals, then multiplying, changing, *transforming*. She saw through it all, everything in blue. There were no people or objects, just energy coalesced. The metals shone brilliantly, as if they were holes into someplace different. Concentrated essence, providing a pathway to power.

She was using the reserves with startling quickness. She slowed her speed, and for some reason the people beside her jumped, holding their ears. She cocked her head, then *PUSHED*.

The Push flung the guards a good fifty feet. That left her facing Suit and Telsin, who regarded her with horrified expressions. They were glowing energy to her, but she recognized them. They had spikes inside of them.

Convenient. Those spikes resisted Pushes, but not enough to bother Marasi now. She lifted a hand and flung both of them away by the very metals they'd used to pierce themselves.

All around, guards grabbed guns and turned on her. She swept them backward, then lifted herself off the ground, Pushing on the trace minerals in the stone beneath her.

She hung there, and was surprised to see something spinning around her. Mist? Where was it coming from?

Me, she realized.

She hovered in the sky, flush with power. In that moment, she *was* the Ascendant Warrior. She held the fullness of what Waxillium had barely tasted his whole life. She could be him, eclipse him. She could bring justice to entire peoples. Holding it all within her, having it and measuring it, she finally admitted the truth to herself.

This isn't what I want.

She would not let her childhood dreams hold sway over her any longer. She smiled, then threw herself through the air in a Push toward the temple.

* * *

Steris watched her sister *fly away*.

"Unexpected," she said. And here she assumed she'd been prepared for anything. Marasi starting to glow, throwing people around with Allomancy as if they were dolls, then streaking away and leaving a trail of mist … well, that hadn't been on the list. It hadn't even made the *appendix*.

She looked down at poor Allik, so cold he'd stopped shivering. "I shall have to enlarge my projections of what is plausible during activities such as this, don't you think?"

He mumbled something in his language. "Foralate men!" He waved his hand in a gesture. "Forsalvin!"

"Telling me to flee without you?" Steris said, walking over and retrieving her notebook. "Yes, running while they are all confused would be wise, but I don't plan to leave yet." She opened the notebook, which she'd hollowed out with Wax's knife in the rear of the skimmer, while Marasi was talking with Allik up front and the others slept. "Did you know that when I evaluated everyone's usefulness on this expedition, I gave myself a seven out of a hundred? Not very high, yes, but I couldn't reasonably give myself the lowest mark possible. I do have my uses."

She turned the large notebook, showing an extra medallion from the skimmer's emergency store settled protectively into the gouged-out section she'd made.

She smiled at Allik, pulled it free, and pressed it into his hand. He let out a long, relieved sigh, and the blown snow that had stuck to his face melted away.

Nearby, soldiers were regaining their feet and shouting to one another.

"And now," Steris said, "I think your earlier suggestion has merit."

* * *

"Now what?" Wax asked Harmony. "I fade off into nothing?"

"I don't believe it's nothing," God said. "There is something beyond. Though perhaps my belief is merely my own desire wishing it to be so."

"You are not encouraging me. Aren't You omnipotent?"

"Hardly," Harmony said, smiling. "But I believe that parts of me *could* be."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"It won't until I make it do so," Harmony said, extending His hands to either side. "In answer to your question, however, you don't fade just yet.

Though soon. Right now, you make a choice."

Wax looked from one of the deity's hands to the other. "Does everyone get this choice?"

"Their choices are different." He proffered His hands to Wax, as if offering them for him to take.

"I don't see the choice."

"My right hand," Harmony said, "is freedom. You can feel it, I think."

And he could. Soaring, released from all bonds, riding upon lines of blue light. Adventure into the unknown, seeking only the fulfillment of his own curiosity. It was glorious. It was what he'd always wanted, and its lure thrummed through him.

Freedom.

Wax gasped. "What … what is the other one?"

Harmony held up His left hand, and Wax heard something. A voice?

"Wax?" it said.

Yes, a frantic voice. Feminine.

"Wax, you have to know what it does. It will heal you, Wax. Waxillium! Please…"

"That hand," Wax said, looking at it. "That hand is duty, isn't it?"

"No, Waxillium," Harmony said gently. "Although that is how you've seen it. Duty or freedom. Burden or adventure. You were always the one who made the *right* choice, when others played. And so you resent it."

"No I don't," Wax said.

Harmony smiled. The understanding in His face was infuriating.

"This hand," Harmony said, "is not duty. It is but a different adventure."

"Wax…" the voice said from below, choked with emotion. It belonged to Marasi. "You *have* to tap the metalmind."

Wax reached toward the left hand, and Harmony—shockingly—pulled it away. "Are you certain?"

"I have to."

"Do you?"

"I *have* to. It's who I am."

“Then perhaps,” Harmony said, “you should stop hating that, my son.” He extended the hand.

Wax hesitated. “Tell me one thing first.”

“If it is within my means.”

“Did she come here? When she passed?”

Harmony smiled. “She asked me to look after you.”

Wax seized the left hand with his own. He was immediately pulled toward something, like air being sucked through a hole. Warmth bathed him; then it became a *fire*. Pulling breath into his lungs, he screamed, heaving, throwing the boulder off. It clattered to the side, and he found himself in the low-roofed chamber beneath the temple.

Such strength! He hadn’t thrown that rock with muscles, but with *steel*. His body reknit even as he launched himself to his feet by Pushing on tiny traces of metal in the ground beneath him. He landed and looked down at his left hand. The one that had been dangling, broken, before his face as he died.

Clutched in it was an oversized spearhead crafted from sixteen different metals melded together. He looked up from it and toward Marasi, who regarded him with tearstained eyes, but a broad smile.

“You found it,” Wax said.

She nodded eagerly. “Just took a little old-fashioned detective work.”

“You saved me,” Wax said.

Rust and Ruin … such *power*. He felt as if he could level cities or build them up anew.

“Suit and your sister are outside,” Marasi said. “I left the others there. I don’t— Well, I wasn’t thinking straight. Or maybe I was thinking too much. Here.” She handed him a vial of metals.

Wax took it, then held up the Bands. “You could have done this yourself.”

“No,” Marasi said. “I couldn’t have.”

“But—”

“I couldn’t have,” Marasi said. “It just … isn’t me.” She shrugged. “Does that make sense?”

“Surprisingly, yes.” He flexed his hand around the Bands.

“Go,” Marasi said. “Do what you do best, Waxillium Ladrian.”

“Which is what? Break things?”

“Break things,” Marasi said, “*with style.*”

He grinned, then downed the vial of metals.

29

“Waxillium’s followers have the Bands!” Suit whispered to himself as he crossed the dark, stony field. Snow had begun falling—a bitter, icy snow, nothing like the soft flakes he’d occasionally seen in the eastern Basin. “It is a crisis. They will be coming for us. We must move up our timetables!”

He chewed on the words, mulling them over as he pulled his coat tight. Warming device notwithstanding, that wind was *annoying.*

Would they buy his argument? No, not dire enough.

“Waxillium and his people have the Bands!” he whispered to himself. “This will undoubtedly let the kandra devise the means of creating metalminds anyone can use. We must move up our timetables and seize Elendel now, or we will find ourselves technologically outmatched!”

Yes. Yes, that was the idea. Even the most careful of the Series would be distressed by the prospect of being technologically outmaneuvered. This would convince them to give him the leeway he desired.

Anything could be an advantage. He’d wanted the Bands for himself, but in lieu of that, he’d find something else.

Suit *always* found the advantage.

He passed soldiers scurrying about and unloading weapons on the frozen plain of rock. They'd planned for a potential fight here, as he'd worried he might encounter more of the masked savages.

"Sir!" one of the men called. "Orders?"

He gestured toward the sky. "If anyone other than the Sequence drops from the air or approaches your position, *shoot* them. Then keep shooting, even after they are down."

"Yes, sir!" the soldier said, waving to a group of his men. He turned toward an empty rack, then paused. "My rifle? Who took my rifle!"

Suit continued on past, tossing the fake Bands of Mourning into the snow and leaving the troops to—hopefully—slow down Waxillium's minions. He eagerly marched aboard the new airship. Now this device, *this* was an advantage. The Bands could serve one man, make a deity out of him. A fleet of ships like this could deify an entire army.

The wooden hallway inside had gaslights set into lamps with austere metal housings. It was all distinctly plainer than the ship that had crashed in Dulsing—the wood here was unornamented, unpolished. The other ship had felt decorated like a den. This one, a warehouse.

Probably cheaper to build this way, he thought, nodding his head in approval.

Footsteps clattered above as men charged through one of the corridors on another deck, and Suit brushed the snow from his arms as a technician ran up to him, bearing the red uniform of the Set's Hidden Guard.

"My lord," the man said, proffering one of the medallions. "You'll need this."

Suit took it and rolled up his sleeve to strap it to his upper arm. "Is this ship operational?"

The man's eyes lit up. "Yes, sir! The machinery is operational, sheltered as it was from the weather. Sir … it's *amazing*. You can *feel* the energy pulsing off that metal. We did have to send men out to unclog the fans—a few of the Coinshots helped—and we have them moving now. Fed is down below, priming the weight-changing machinery with her Feruchemy, to lighten the ship. That should be the last step!”

“Then lift us off,” Suit said, walking toward where he assumed the bridge would be found.

“My lord Suit?” the man called after him. “Aren’t we waiting for the Sequence?”

He hesitated only briefly. Where had she gotten to?

Another advantage? he thought. He could stand being Sequence.

“She will join us aloft if she can,” he said. “Our priority is to get this ship, and its secrets, to a secure location.”

As the technician saluted and ran to obey, Suit filled his medallion, becoming lighter. So much easier than getting his spikes had been. It was hard not to feel that their experiments in Hemalurgy had been a waste, a dead end.

The ship quivered, and the fans started up with a much louder sound than he had expected. Before he reached the bridge, the thing rocked, and he heard ice cracking above the sound of the fans. He leaned over to a porthole, looking out as the ground retreated.

It *worked*. Immediately, implications flooded his mind. Travel. Shipping. Warfare. New regions could be settled. New types of buildings and docks would be needed.

It would all flow through him.

He suppressed a smile—best to celebrate *after* he was safely away—but he could not stop the heady sensation. The Set had been planning for events a century or more away, putting careful plots into motion at his suggestion. He was proud of those, but truth be told, he’d rather they rule in *his* lifetime.

And with this, he could do so.

* * *

Jordis huddled in the tent, watching her crew die.

It had been long coming, this death. The last ember of the fire, refusing to give up its spark. During the terrible march through the dead rain, her people had been given tiny sips of warmth from a metalmind. Enough to barely keep them alive, like plants locked in a dark shed for most of the day.

But now, in this place, the cold was too pervasive—and the hardships of the march too devastating. She crawled among her crew and whispered encouragement, though she could no longer feel her fingers or toes. Most of the men and women of the ship couldn't even nod. A few had started removing their clothing, complaining of heat. Chillfever had struck them.

Not long now. The maskless devils seemed to know this; they'd posted only a single guard at the tent. Her people could have snuck away out the back, perhaps. But what would they sneak toward? Death outside in the winds rather than death inside here?

How do the maskless survive it? she wondered. They must be devils indeed, born of the frost itself, to be so capable of withstanding the cold.

Jordis knelt beside Petrine, the enginemaster and eldest of her crew. How had the woman survived so long? She was by no means feeble, but she was past her sixth decade. Petrine lifted her hand and gripped Jordis's arm—though her wrinkled eyes were shadowed by the mask, Jordis needed no gesture or expression to know Petrine's emotions.

"Do we attack?" Petrine asked.

"For what purpose?"

"We could die by their weapons instead of the cold."

Wise, those words. Perhaps they could—

A loud thump came from outside the tent. Jordis found her feet, surprisingly, though most of the others remained huddling where they lay. The front of the tent burst open and a man with a familiar—but broken—mask appeared there.

Impossible. Was the chillfever striking her too?

The man raised his mask and displayed a bearded, youthful face. "I am sorry to have come in unannounced," Allik said. "But I bear gifts, as is traditional for visiting someone's house unannounced, yes?"

He held up a gloved fist, which clutched a bundle of medallions by their cords.

Jordis looked from the medallions to young Allik, then back. For once she didn't even care about how free he was with raising his mask. She stumbled to him, seizing one of them, unable to believe.

The wonderful warmth ran through her, like a sunrise within. She sighed in relief, her mind clearing. It *was* him. "How?" she whispered.

"I," Allik proclaimed, "have made friends with some of the devils." He gestured to the side and a female maskless one almost toppled in, wearing one of the long dresses that were popular here, carrying an armful of rifles.

She said something in her language, dropping the guns to the floor of the tent and dusting off her hands.

"I think she wants us to start shooting the other ones," Allik said as Jordis quickly grabbed the other medallions and began distributing them to the most severely afflicted of her people. "I, for one, am *more* than happy to oblige."

Petrine continued the distribution as Jordis armed herself with one of the guns. Though the warmth was wonderful, she still felt weak, and she didn't want to look in her boots to see if her toes had frostbite. "I don't know that we will put up much of a fight."

"Better than no fight at all, yes, Captain?" Allik asked.

"This is true," Jordis admitted, and made a sign of respect, touching her right shoulder with her left hand, then lowering her hand to touch her wrist. "You did well. Almost I forgive you for your terrible dancing." She turned to Petrine. "Arm the men and women with these weapons. Let's kill as many of the devils as we can."

* * *

Wax ripped from the temple in a burst of might and Allomancy. He spun above the building, rocks flung by his explosive exit tumbling in the air around him, trailing mist. Below, a storm of gunfire broke out on the previously quiet mountainside, though they weren't firing at him.

Above it, an airship lumbered through the sky, fans whirring powerfully on its two pontoons. It was awesome to behold, but the ship was obviously not spry. It moved with the ponderous motions of something very large, and very heavy—even with the weight reduction granted by the medallions.

Wax was tempted to crush the ship. Push the nails from their mountings, rip the thing apart in a storm of destruction, dumping Suit and his traitorous sister to the frozen ground below. He almost did it. But … rusts. He wasn't an executioner. He was a lawman. He'd rather die than betray that.

Well, die *again*.

He dropped, then used the trace metals in the stonework of the temple as an anchor to send himself soaring across the ground in a swoop. A few of the soldiers below took halfhearted shots at him, but most seemed engrossed in a gunfight with a group of people in masks who had taken up a position behind a rocky shelf.

Steris, Allik, Wax thought, identifying them. *Good.*

He landed among the soldiers and flung them aside. He grabbed an aluminum pistol from one of their racks, loaded it, then waved to the masked people before hurling himself into the sky after the airship.

He was strong. Incredibly strong. The Bands, still clutched in his left hand, somehow gave him not just Allomancy, but *ancient* Allomancy. The potency of those who had lived long ago, during the time of the Lord Ruler. Perhaps even more. Was that possible?

What did you create? he wondered. *And how long will it last?*

His resources were diminishing. Not merely the metals inside of him, but the reserves stored inside the Bands. Stores that changed his level of Investiture.

He should have held back, he knew—reserved it for study, or for use in a future emergency—but *rusts* it was intoxicating. He reached the airship easily, despite only having a few shell casings to Push upon below. He soared up and landed on the ship's nose, then smashed his hand through one of the windows to the bridge, any cuts healing immediately.

Inside, Suit sat alone. There was no sign of pilots, technicians, or servants. Just a wide, half-oval deck, not even carpeted, and Suit in a chair.

Wax climbed in and raised the aluminum pistol. His boots thumped on the wood. He did a quick scan. *People in the hallway outside,* he thought. *And a bit of metal in Suit's mouth.* The old coin-in-the-mouth trick, a way to hide metal from an Allomancer. Anything inside the body was very hard to sense.

Unless you were bearing the very powers of creation, that is.

"And so," Suit said, lighting his pipe, "our confrontation comes at long last."

"Not much of a confrontation," Wax said, still alight with power. "I could destroy you a hundred different ways right now, Uncle."

"I don't doubt that you could," Suit said, shaking out his match, then puffing on the pipe. Trying to hide the coin. Talking around a pipe let him have a reason to sound odd. "And here I can only destroy you *one* way."

Wax leveled his pistol.

Suit looked right at it and smiled. "Do you know why I've always beaten you, Nephew?"

"You haven't beaten me," Wax said. "You've refused to fight. That is an entirely different thing."

"But sometimes the only way to win *is* to refuse to fight."

Wax strode forward, wary of traps. He thought faster, moved faster than normal. The blue lines spread from him as a brilliant web, seeking sources of metal smaller—and farther away—than he could normally sense. At times this seemed to flicker, and for a moment he saw the *radiance* inside of each person and thing. It felt as if he might be able to move those too.

An awed voice in the back of his mind whispered, *They're all the same. Metal, minds, men, all the same substance.…*

"What have you done, Uncle?" Wax asked softly.

"And here I must answer my own question," Edwarn said, shaking his head and standing. "I beat you, Waxillium, *not* because of preparation—though it is extensive. I beat you not because of wit or strength of arm, but because of a unique ability of mine. Creativity."

"You're going to bludgeon me with paintings?"

"Always quick with a wry comment!" Suit said. "Bravo."

“What have you done?”

“I armed the bomb,” Suit said. “It is set to explode in mere moments. Unless I stop it.”

“Let it explode,” Wax said, holding up the Bands—metallic strata weaving across the triangular chunk of metal. “I’m pretty sure I’ll survive it.”

“And those below?” Suit asked. “Your friends? My captives? From the sounds of it, they’re fighting quite vigorously for their freedom. How sad it will be to see them vaporized by an explosion I’ve been told should be enough to destroy a large city all on its—”

Wax increased the speed of his thoughts, tapping zinc. He sorted through a dozen scenarios. Find the explosives and Push them away? How far could he get them? Would Suit detonate the bomb before he could arrive?

His speed of body was nearly tapped out—Marasi must have used that in getting to him—so yes, Suit would have time, though would he actually *do* it? Would he blow himself up, along with this ship, to defeat Wax?

If this were an ordinary criminal, Wax would have bet strongly against it. Unfortunately, Suit and the Set in general had demonstrated a level of fanaticism he had not expected. Like the way Miles had acted as he was executed. These people were not just thugs and thieves; they were political reformers, slaves to an ideal.

What else? What else could Wax do? He discarded scenario after scenario. Get Marasi and the others to safety: too slow. Shoot Suit now: the man could heal himself, and Wax might not have time to get to the bomb and remove it before the blast happened anyway. Push the ship upward? He wouldn’t be able to do that fast enough; unless he Pushed slowly, he’d rip the vessel apart.

“—own,” Suit said.

“What do you want?” Wax demanded. “I’m not going to let you go.”

“You don’t need to,” Suit said. “I have little doubt that you’d chase me across the world, Waxillium. I might be creative, but you … you are *tenacious*.”

“What, then?”

“You drop the Bands out the window,” Suit said. “I order the bomb disarmed. Then we face one another as men, without unnatural advantages.”

“You think I’d trust you?”

“You don’t need to,” Suit said. “Just give me your word you’ll do it.”

“Done,” Wax said.

“Disarm the device!” Suit shouted toward the door. He strolled to the front of the ship and spoke into a tube there. “Disarm it and stand down.”

Feet thumped away from the door. Wax could actually watch them go—not by their metals, but by the signature their souls made. In moments, he could see nobody there, or hiding anywhere around the bridge.

A voice soon echoed up through the tube. The tin Wax burned let him hear. “Done, my lord.” A pause. “Thank Trell for that.” The voice sounded relieved.

Suit turned to Wax. “There is a tradition in the Roughs, is there not? Two men, a dusty road, guns on their hips. Man against man. One lives. The other dies. A dispute settled.” He patted the sidearm at his hip. “I can’t give you a dusty road, but perhaps we can squint and pretend that the frost is playing that role.”

Wax drew his lips to a line. Edwarn looked entirely sincere. “Don’t make me do this, Uncle.”

“Why?” Suit said. “I know you’ve been *itching* for this exact opportunity! You have an aluminum gun, I see. The same as mine. No Steelpushing to interfere. Just two men and their sidearms.”

“Uncle…”

“You’ve dreamed of it, son. The chance to shoot me, no questions asked, and not be running afoul of the law. Besides, to the law I’m already dead! Your conscience can rest. I won’t give in, and I’m armed. The only way to stop me is to shoot me. Let’s do it.”

Wax fingered the Bands of Mourning, and felt himself smiling. “You don’t understand at all, do you?”

“Oh, I do. I’ve seen it in you! The hidden hunger of the lawman, wishing to be cut free so he can kill. It’s what defines you and your type.”

“No,” Wax said. He unhooked the holster from his leg, the one that had held his shotgun, and slipped the Bands into its leather pouch. His remaining bullets and metal vials followed, leaving him with no metals, save the aluminum gun.

“Perhaps I have felt hidden hunger,” Wax said. “But it isn’t what defines me.”

“Oh, and what does?”

Wax tossed the leather holding the Bands out the broken window, then slipped his gun into his side holster. “I’ll show you.”

* * *

Telsin scrambled in the snow, climbing through it, frantic.

Suit was an idiot. She’d always known this, but today made it manifest. Flying away in the ship? That was the *first* place they’d go to chase him. He was as good as dead.

Today was a disaster. An unparalleled disaster. Waxillium knew of her subterfuge. The Set was exposed. Their plans were crumbling.

Something had to be salvageable. She stumbled to a small clearing in the snow, near the temple entrance, where her people had deposited the skimmer that she and Waxillium had ridden in on. Still functional, hopefully. She knew how it worked—she’d watched carefully during their trip. All she needed to do was—

Something *banged* behind her.

She blinked at the sudden spray of redness on the snow all around her. Flakes of it.

Her blood.

“You killed one of my friends today,” a ragged voice said from behind. “I’m not going to let you take a second.”

She fell to her knees before the craft, then turned her head. Wayne stood behind her in the snow, his face haggard, holding a shotgun.

"You…" Telsin whispered. "You can't … guns…"

"Yeah," Wayne said, cocking the shotgun. "About that."

He lowered the barrel to her face and fired.

* * *

Marasi climbed the previously hidden steps back into the room with the broken glass and the ornate pedestal. She didn't know what had opened this hidden path, but she was glad for it. Ever blunt, Waxillium had simply ripped himself a hole out of the catacombs, going straight up through the stone—half this chamber had collapsed as a result—but following his route would have been an arduous climb.

The power was gone. She'd handed it over to Waxillium, but instead of feeling deflated, she felt … peaceful. Hers was the serenity of a woman who'd lain stretched out on a perfect summer day, feeling the sun as it slowly sank. Yes, the light was gone now, but *oh* what a joy it had been.

Poor MeLaan was still here, and her form had started to incorporate the bones, slowly assembling them in a strange configuration. With no spikes, she'd become a mistwraith. Marasi knelt beside her, but wasn't certain what comfort she could offer. At the very least, MeLaan seemed to still be alive.

Marasi rose, then hurried down the hallway with the traps, reaching the entryway with the murals. Outside, a war was going on, hundreds of gunshots echoing in the cold, snow-filled night. She was surprised to see that the people in masks seemed to be winning. The soldiers had been pushed back to the edge of the stone field, their backs to a series of gulfs and cliffs. They had nowhere to retreat, and many of their number lay dead or wounded.

She thought she saw Waxillium's influence in the way some of those bodies lay, as if tossed through the air to land crumpled. Marasi nodded in satisfaction. Let him do the job he came to do.

She still had one of her own to finish. She strode out of the temple, down the steps past the statue of the Lord Ruler holding what now, with the spearhead removed, appeared to be only a staff.

Now where would she find—

A loud gunshot from quite nearby. She swiveled her head, searching for the source. A second one sounded.

A moment later, Wayne emerged through the snowstorm, head down, expression shadowed. He carried a shotgun on his shoulder, and clutched not one, but *three* small metal spikes in his other hand.

* * *

Wax stood quietly on the bridge of the ship, waiting for his uncle to move.

This didn't work the way it did in the stories. You didn't outdraw a man; couldn't happen, not without Feruchemical speed. If you waited for him to start moving, you would be too slow. He'd tried it with blanks on the fastest men he knew.

The man who drew first got the first shot. That was that.

Suit drew.

Wax Pushed on the metal window frame behind him. He crossed the distance between them in a blur, even as Suit fired. The bullet hit Wax in the shoulder, but Wax collided with the surprised Suit, knocking them both to the floor of the bridge.

Suit grabbed his arm. Wax's metal reserves vanished.

"Aha!" Suit said. "I made myself a Leecher! I can drain the metals from anyone who touches me, Waxillium. You're dead. No Bands. No Allomancy. I win."

Wax grunted, clinging tight to Suit as they rolled. "You forget," he said. "I'm not surprised. You've always hated it. I'm a *Terrisman,* Uncle."

He increased his weight manyfold.

He tapped everything he had in his arm bracer, hundreds of hours spent being lighter than he should have been. He brought it all out in one moment of desperation.

The airship lurched. And then the floor shattered.

Wax clung to Suit as they fell, holding him tight, though one hand was weakening from the gunshot. They crashed through two levels of the ship—

Suit's body, which tapped healing, bearing the brunt of the damage—before smashing out the bottom, battered, bleeding, and thrashed by splintered wood.

Suit looked horrified. "You fool! You—"

Wax spun them in the air, pointing Suit downward as they plummeted. Snow-filled air was a roaring wind around them, flakes streaking past.

Suit screamed.

And then he Pushed.

Suit dropped the coin from his mouth and used his Allomancy to Push it downward in a straight shot. It hit the approaching ground and slowed the two of them with a lurch.

Wax decreased his weight just enough that Suit's Push was sufficient to keep them alive. They crashed into the snow, some distance from the plateau with the temple.

Wax recovered first. He lurched to his feet and pulled Suit up by one hand, the two of them standing alone in a field of white. Suit looked up at him, dazed by the fall and the impact.

"The definition of a lawman, *Uncle*, is easy," Wax said, feeling blood from a dozen cuts trickle down his face. He lifted Suit by the front of his clothing, bringing him close. "He's the man who takes the bullet so nobody else has to."

With that, Wax decked him across the face and dropped him to the snow, unconscious.

* * *

MeLaan swam in a sea of terror. Terror within her own mind; a piece of her knowing this was not right. This being ruled by instinct, this craven set of impulses.

But this was what she did. Food. She needed food.

No. First a place to hide. From the trembling sounds. Hide away, find a crack. She continued building a body that would let her walk. Flee.

So cold. She didn’t understand coldness. It wasn’t a thing that should be. And she couldn’t taste dirt, just stone. Stone everywhere.

Frozen stone.

She felt like screaming. Something was missing. Not food. Not a place to hide, but … something. Something was horribly, horribly, horribly wrong.

An object dropped on her. It was cold, but not stone. This wasn’t food. She enfolded it and intended to spit it away, but then something happened.

Something wonderful. She gobbled up the second one as it was dropped, and began to undulate, frantic. It came *back*. Memory. Knowledge. Rationality.

Self.

She exulted in it, ignoring the little holes that were now poked in her memory. She remembered most of the trip here, but something had happened in the room with the Bands.… No, the Bands hadn’t been there, and …

She formed eyes first, and she knew what she would see when she opened them. She’d already tasted him on the air, and knew his flavor.

“Welcome back,” Wayne said, grinning. “I think we won.”

30

Marasi accepted the canteen from Allik. It steamed from the top although it was only lukewarm to the touch. She sat on the steps up to the temple, swathed in about forty blankets. She'd surrendered her medallion to one of the Malwish people until more could be secured from the airship.

And its recovery was an interesting sight to say the least. Waxillium stood on the rocky section before the plateau, heaving with two hands and Pulling on nothing visible. Up ahead, the rogue airship slowly sank through the snow-filled sky, drawn toward Waxillium on an invisible tether.

"Will it break apart?" Allik asked.

She looked at him with surprise, then down at his language medallion.

"Warm choc and a blanket will do me for a minute," he said, settling down and pulling his blanket around him. "Others are in greater need, yah? The ship. Will it break?"

Marasi looked up toward it. She could imagine Suit's people aboard, trying desperately to make the engines work harder, the fans blow more powerfully. It sank anyway. Waxillium Ladrian—bearing the Bands of Mourning and supremely annoyed—was like a force of nature.

She smiled and sipped her drink.

“Rusts!” she said, looking at it. “What is this?” It was sweet, thick, warm, chocolaty, and *wonderful*.

“Choc,” he said. “Sometimes it is a man’s only succor in this frozen, lonely world, yah?”

“You *drink chocolate*?”

“Sure. Don’t you?”

She never had. Plus, this was far sweeter than the chocolate she was used to. Not bitter at all. She took a long, soothing draught. “Allik, this is the most wonderful thing I’ve ever experienced. And I just held the powers of creation themselves.”

He smiled.

“I don’t think your ship is in danger,” Marasi said. “He’s Pulling on it evenly, and slowly. He’s a careful man, Waxillium is.”

“Careful? It seems to me he is very proficient at breaking things. That doesn’t sound particularly careful, yah?”

“Well,” Marasi said, sipping her drink, “he does it with amazing precision.”

Indeed, it wasn’t long before the airship settled down onto the rocks, still in one piece. Waxillium held it in place, then raised the Bands of Mourning in one hand, winds, snows, and even traces of mist swirling around him.

The fans slowly powered down. A short time later, soldiers exited with hands up. Wayne and MeLaan scurried up to them, gathering weapons while Allik’s people boarded the ship to secure it and search for anyone lurking inside.

Marasi waited through it all, sipping her melted chocolate and thinking. ReLuur’s spike lay safely wrapped in a handkerchief, tucked into her pocket. In her mind’s eye, she saw Wayne again as he had been, trudging through the snow, gun to his shoulder, a pattern of frozen blood flaking his skin. Alongside this image was the glee with which Waxillium had launched into the sky to chase down his uncle.

There was a darkness to these men that the stories hadn't conveyed. Marasi was glad for it, but she had stepped to that ledge, then turned back. Proud though she was of having fulfilled her mission for the kandra, she had decided that things would be different for her in the future. She was all right with that.

It was what she had chosen.

"Frosts," Allik said after some time. "We'd better go do something, yah?"

She looked up from her now-empty canteen of chocolate to follow Allik's gesture. The Malwish airship crew had returned from their inspection, and the enemy soldiers had been led away—to be safely locked in the ship's brig, Marasi believed.

Suit was still where Waxillium had put him: tied to the top of the Lord Ruler's spear, feet dangling. He'd been gagged, he'd had his metalminds removed, and Waxillium had used Allomancy to leech away his metals. And this *still* seemed like it might not be cautious enough. He still had his spikes, as they weren't sure how to remove them without killing him. He shouldn't be able to do anything without metals, but she couldn't help being worried.

Steris had joined Waxillium on the field, and he'd put his arm around her shoulders. Marasi smiled. Now *that* was an image she'd never thought she'd find comforting. But they would do well together.

Unfortunately, trouble approached Waxillium and Steris in the form of Allik's captain and some of her airmen. The two groups faced one another, MeLaan and Wayne falling in beside Waxillium—Wayne casually carrying that shotgun, MeLaan standing a good two inches taller than anyone else, arms folded, her posture unyielding.

Right. "Let's go," Marasi said to Allik.

Allik's captain, Jordis, wore one of the translation medallions—and she didn't flinch before the gust of wind that accompanied Marasi as she arrived.

"We thank you for your help," Jordis was saying, her voice touched by the same accent Allik had. "But our appreciation does not allow us to ignore thievery. We expect that our property will be returned."

“I don’t see any of your property here,” Waxillium replied coldly. “I see only an artifact *we* recovered. Well, that and my airship.”

“Your—” Jordis sputtered. She stepped forward. “Since crashing in your lands, my crew has been incarcerated, tortured, and *murdered*. You seem to be itching for a war, Allomancer.”

Drat. Marasi had been hoping she’d share Allik’s reverence for Waxillium. Indeed, much of the crew seemed nervous about him, but the captain obviously didn’t mean to back down.

“If there is to be war,” Waxillium said, “giving you a powerful weapon does not seem the method to save my people. I cannot help what Suit and his people did to you—they are outlaws, and what they did was deplorable. I will see them brought to justice.”

“And yet you steal from us.”

“Do you deny,” Waxillium asked, “that this temple was *empty* upon my arrival? Do you deny that this airship was from nation other than your own? I cannot steal what was not owned, Captain. By right of salvage, I claim this relic and that ship. You may—”

Marasi was about to step between them when, curiously, Steris spoke up, interrupting Wax.

“Lord Waxillium,” she said. “I think it prudent to let them take the ship.”

“What? Like hell I’m going to—”

“Waxillium,” Steris said softly. “They’re tired, miserable, and a long way from home. How do you suggest, otherwise, that they are to return to those they love? Is that justice?”

His lips tightened. “The Set has one of these ships to study, Steris.”

“Then,” Steris said, looking to Jordis, “we will beg—in return for the generosity of this gift—that the Malwish people open trade with us. I suspect we can purchase ships from them more quickly than the Set can build their own.”

Marasi nodded. *Not bad, Steris.*

“If they’ll sell,” Waxillium said.

"I think that they will," Steris said, looking to Jordis. "Because the good captain will persuade them that access to our Allomancers is worth relinquishing a technological monopoly."

"That's true," Marasi said, stepping up to the rest, Allik with her. "We're rare among you, aren't we?"

"We?" Allik asked as the captain looked to her.

"I'm an Allomancer too," she said, amused. "You didn't see me charging the cube device back in the warehouse?"

"I was … a little distracted.…" he said, sounding woozy. "Oh dear. Um. Great One."

Marasi sighed, looking to Jordis.

"I can promise you nothing," the captain said to Steris, sounding reluctant. "The Malwish are but one of many. Another nation among us may see you up here as weak and decide to strike."

"Then," Steris said, "you *might* want to inform them that the Bands of Mourning are here, ready to punish those who attack."

Jordis hissed. Marasi couldn't see her features behind the mask, but the hand swipe she made did not look pleased. "Impossible. You give me the lesser prize to distract me from the greater, yah? We will not give you the Sovereign's weapon."

"You're not giving it to *us*," Steris said. She looked to MeLaan, who watched with crossed arms. "Allik. Your people have stories of creatures like her, do you not?"

"Tell the others," Marasi said to Allik. "Please."

He removed his medallion and launched into a furious explanation in his language, waving his hands, then gesturing at MeLaan. She cocked an eyebrow, then made her skin translucent—displaying a skeleton that was so cracked and mangled, Marasi was left momentarily stunned. How was MeLaan still standing?

The captain took this in.

"We," Steris said, "will give the Bands to the immortal kandra. They are wise and impartial, tasked with serving all people. They will promise not to let us use the Bands unless we are attacked by your kind.”

There was no way to tell what Captain Jordis thought, her expression hidden behind that mask. When she did speak, she made a few curt gestures—but those could be faked far more easily than facial expressions, Marasi figured. What did one make of a society where everyone hid their true feelings behind a mask, only letting out calculated reactions?

“This is an unpleasant accommodation,” Jordis said. “It means I will limp back to my people, half my crew dead and my ship exchanged for one decades out of date.”

“True,” Steris continued at Waxillium’s side—he merely stood there with arms folded, *looming,* as he was so good at doing. “But Captain, you will return with something more valuable than an old relic or even your fallen ship. You’ll have new trading partners in a land brimming with Metalborn. Has it been mentioned that my lord Waxillium holds an important seat in our government? That he has a dramatic influence over trade, tariffs, and taxation? Those among your people who secure favorable treaties with us could become very rich indeed.”

Jordis regarded them, then folded her arms, facing Waxillium directly. “It is still unpleasant.” Jordis was much shorter, but she managed to loom pretty well herself. In fact, Marasi got the distinct impression that the woman wanted to shout at them, attack in a rage, seek retribution for what had been done to her and hers. Anything but just simply trade.

Perhaps some emotions were too strong to be hidden even by a mask.

Jordis finally nodded. “Very well. Let it be done. But I will not leave without a draft agreement—a promise of intentions, if nothing else.”

Marasi breathed a sigh of relief, shooting Steris a nod of appreciation. Still, she did not miss the stiffness in Jordis’s posture as she and Waxillium shook hands. The Basin had not made a friend this day. Hopefully some last-minute scrambling had prevented them from making an enemy.

“I have one further request,” Waxillium said to her.

“What?” Jordis asked, suspicious.

"Nothing terrible or costly," Waxillium said. "Honestly, I'd just like a ride."

* * *

The Southerners agreed, fortunately. They didn't particularly want to carry a brigful of enemy soldiers all the way south. Wax had to make it very clear they couldn't keep Suit himself, and the captain relented with minimal argument. She seemed to realize that her best chance of seeing justice done to all of those who had brutalized her crew lay in letting Wax do some thorough interrogations.

He kept his relationship to the man quiet.

As the Malwish crew prepared the ship for travel, Wax stood before the statue of the Lord Ruler, with that single spike in his eye. He'd checked the belt, which was aluminum. No kind of charge. If there had ever been two bracers, he had to assume they'd been made into this one spearhead.

Marasi passed behind him. "I'm going to go check our skimmer for supplies we might have left behind."

Wax nodded. *I held your power,* he thought toward the statue, *if only a tiny bit of it. Rusts … I think I understand.*

He'd given the Bands to MeLaan, and she had made them vanish into her flesh. He was *glad* to know that they were effectively out of his reach. Too much power.

He raised his finger in farewell to the Lord Ruler, then jogged off after Marasi.

"Aradel and the Senate won't like this deal," Wax noted as he reached her. "Particularly the part about us giving away the Bands."

"I know," Marasi said.

"As long as I can tell him it wasn't my idea."

She glanced at him. "You don't seem too broken up about losing the Bands."

"I'm not," he admitted. "I was worried, honestly. The Bands are drained, mostly, but we could probably recharge them by compounding. The power they offer is something…”

“… Sublime and devastating at once?” Marasi asked. “Dangerous because of what it could do in the wrong hands, yet somehow *more* dangerous in your own?”

“Yes.”

They shared something in that moment, swept by winds. Something they’d touched, something—hopefully—only they would know.

They turned together without a word, seeking the skimmer. Jordis would want to load it on the ship, but first there was a corpse Wax needed to see. He didn’t blame Wayne for what he’d done to Telsin. Yes, taking her to Elendel for justice—and interrogation—would have been better. And yes, he found that he’d rather have pulled the trigger himself. Harmony was right about that.

But either way, Telsin was dealt with. That meant—

Blood on the snow.

No skimmer.

More importantly, no body.

Marasi froze in place as they drew near, but Wax approached the empty patch of ground. She had slipped away, again. He found he was not surprised, though he was impressed. She’d gotten the skimmer aloft and away during the fighting, escaping during the chaos.

Wayne should have known she might be able to heal herself, Wax thought, going down on one knee beside the eerie pattern of blood drops that seemed to outline a body.

“It’s not done, then,” Marasi said.

Wax brushed the drops of blood, frozen to the ground. He’d spent the last eighteen months trying to save this woman. And when he finally had, she’d killed him.

“It’s not done,” he said. “But in some ways, that’s better.”

“Because your sister isn’t dead?”

He turned toward Marasi. It seemed that despite hours in this frozen place, the cold had only just reached inside of him.

“No,” he said. “Because now I have someone to hunt.”

31

“Wax, you *gotta* see this!”

Wax tipped his head back, bleary-eyed. These bunks were not particularly pleasant, but at least the airship flew in a calm, smooth manner. That was nice, as the skimmer had always felt as if it were one gust of wind away from plowing nose-first into a hillside.

Wayne hung halfway out of the room’s large window.

“That window opens?” Wax asked, surprised.

“Any window opens,” Wayne said, “if you push hard enough. Look, you’ve *gotta* see this.”

Wax sighed, climbing up and leaning out of the window beside Wayne. Beneath them, Elendel spread out as a vast sea of lights.

“Like rivers of fire,” Wayne mumbled. “Look how it follows patterns. Rich areas more lit, roads all in lines. Beautiful.”

Wax grunted.

“That’s all you can say, mate?”

“Wayne, I see this basically every night.”

“Now, that there, that ain’t fair. You should feel guilty.”

“For being a Coinshot?”

“For cheatin’ at life, Wax.”

“How about I feel appreciative instead?”

“Suppose that’ll do.”

Wax settled down on his bunk, then pulled on his boots, doing the laces. He ached like a man beaten senseless. He wished he could blame the strain of the last few days, but he’d held the Bands of Mourning and had been healed completely.

That meant these aches came merely from sleeping a few hours on this bunk. Rusts. He *was* getting old. Upon considering that, however, he found that mortality didn’t frighten him as it once had.

“We should get up to the bridge,” he suggested, standing. It had been a full day since they’d left the mountains. They’d stopped at a town to telegraph ahead at Wax’s insistence, then waited until the next night to fly the rest of the way. He had had no intention of bringing a massive flying warship anywhere near the city without at least giving warning first.

Jordis had been amenable, once he’d promised her supplies for their trip home in repayment. Marasi worried about the captain, he knew, but he had looked into the woman’s eyes behind the mask. She was a soldier, a killer, despite her claims of hers being a simple trading vessel.

She knew. Wax had held the Bands. He could have swept the Malwish away and stolen their ship without a second thought. Instead, he’d given in to Steris’s compromise. Strong words notwithstanding, Jordis realized she’d gotten more out of this deal than she had any reason to expect.

Wayne joined him outside their room, and they stepped aside as a few wearied airmen passed. He couldn’t see their faces, but could read a world of emotions from their hunched backs and subdued speech.

“They’ve been broken,” Wayne whispered, looking over his shoulder as the airmen continued on. “Ain’t fair what happened to these folks, Wax.”

“Is life ever fair?”

“It has been to me,” Wayne said. “More than fair, I reckon. Considering what I deserve.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Wax asked.

“What?”

“You used a gun, Wayne.”

“Bah, that was a shotgun. Barely counts.”

Wax rested a hand on his friend’s shoulder.

Wayne shrugged. “Guess my body figured, ‘What the hell?’”

“I thought it meant you’d forgiven yourself.”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I was just real mad at your sister.”

“You knew, didn’t you?” Wax asked, frowning. “That she’d heal?”

“Well, I didn’t wanna kill someone in cold blood—”

“That’s good, I suppose.”

“—but there weren’t no fire around to light her with first.”

“Wayne…”

The shorter man sighed. “I saw the metalminds peekin’ outta her sleeves. Figured, if you’re gonna give yourself one power from a Feruchemist, you’d wanna be able to heal. I ain’t gonna kill your sister, mate. But I didn’t mind makin’ her jump a bit, and I needed MeLaan’s spikes.”

Wayne’s gaze grew distant. “Shoulda stayed there, I suppose. To stop her from runnin’, you know? But I wasn’t of sound mind, so to speak. I thought you were *dead*, mate. Really thought it. And I kept thinkin’ to myself, ‘Would Wax kill her for real? Or would he give her another chance, like he gave me?’ So I let her be. I stayed my hand, ’cuz it was the last thing I could do for you. Does that make sense?”

Wax squeezed Wayne’s shoulder. “Thank you. I’m glad you’re learning.”

It felt disingenuous to say that when inside, in truth, he wished Wayne had stripped off her metalminds and left her a frozen corpse.

Wayne grinned. Wax nodded in the direction the airmen had gone. “I’ll meet you up there.”

“Going to go fetch your woman?” Wayne said. “She’s gonna have a hard time adjustin’ to life back here, away from her native habitat of the frozen, icy, desolate wastes up—”

“Wayne,” Wax interrupted, soft but firm.

“Hum?”

“Enough.”

“I was just—”

“Enough.”

Wayne stopped with his mouth open, then licked his lips and nodded. “Right, then. See you up above in a few, mate?”

“We’ll be right along.”

Wayne scampered off toward the bridge. Wax trailed through the hallway, heading down several doors to the room Steris and Marasi had been sharing. He raised his hand to knock, but it was cracked, so he peeked in. Steris lay on a bunk, wrapped in a blanket, sleeping softly. There was no sign of Marasi; she’d mentioned wanting to watch the approach to the city from the bridge.

He hesitated at the door, watching her sleep. He almost left; she’d been through so much these last few days. She had to be exhausted. Once they reached Elendel, they’d still have to unload the prisoners and bring the supplies on board—it could be hours before the ship had to leave. She could sleep a little longer, couldn’t she?

The door creaked as he leaned against it, and Steris started awake. Her eyes found him immediately. Then she smiled, relaxing, and huddled up against her pillow. She was wearing a travel dress under the blanket.

Wax stepped into the room and took a seat on the bunk across from Steris; there was so little space in this room that his knees touched her bunk after he sat. And these were the rooms the airmen considered large. He leaned forward, taking Steris’s hand in his.

She squeezed it, eyes closed once more, and they sat there. Still. Everyone else could wait a few minutes.

“Thank you,” Wax said softly.

“For what?” she said.

“Coming with me.”

“I didn’t do much.”

“You were extremely helpful at the party,” Wax said. “And your negotiations with the Malwish … Steris, that was incredible.”

“Perhaps,” she said. “But I still feel that I was basically luggage for most of the trip.”

He shrugged. “Steris, I think we’re all like that. Shuffled from place to place by duty, or society, or God Himself. It seems like we’re just along for the ride, even in our own lives. But once in a while, we *do* face a choice. A real one. We may not be able to choose what happens to us, or where we’ll stop, but we point ourselves in a direction.” He squeezed her hand. “You pointed yourself toward me.”

“Well,” she said, smiling, “being near you *is* generally the safest place. …”

He cupped her face with his hand, all callused and rough. *Another adventure.*

Eventually, an airman came looking for them, and Wax reluctantly stood, helping Steris up. Then they walked—arm in arm—through the hallways of the ship and up to the bridge, where the others waited.

Here, Wax was able to appreciate what Wayne had seen. With the panoramic view from the bridge, the city really was gorgeous at night. *Is this a sight that will become commonplace?* Wax thought as Steris squeezed his arm, grinning at the sight. This airship technology was new, but not many years had passed since he’d seen his first motorcar on the road.

Marasi had been directing Captain Jordis through the city. Wax couldn’t read anything in the captain’s posture, or those of her crew. Were they impressed by the size of the city and the height of the skyscrapers? Or were these things commonplace in the South?

They approached Ahlstrom Tower, and Wax could only imagine the stories this would prompt in the broadsheets the next morning. Good. He hated subterfuge; let the people of Elendel know, to a man, that the world had just become a much larger place.

Ahlstrom Tower, in which Wax had an ownership interest, had a flat top. The captain had assured him that she could land her ship “on a nail, so long as the head is smooth enough.” True to her word, they set it down.

“You’re certain you don’t want to stay?” Marasi asked Jordis. “Visit our city, find out what we’re *actually* like?”

“No. Thank you.” The words sounded forced, to Wax. But who was to say, with the accent muddying things? “We will take your offer of supplies and be away tonight.”

Time to debark. Together—the others filing after—Wax and Steris made their way through the halls again.

“It almost feels,” Steris said softly, “like this entire experience was a dream. I need to write it all down quickly, lest it fade.”

Wax found himself nodding as he thought of his meeting with Harmony.

The hallway led to a junction where the wall had opened and a long docking bridge had been settled in place, leading down to the rooftop. Below, Wax picked out several figures craning their necks to look at the ship. Governor Aradel had come in person.

Allik stood at the door, and he lifted his mask as Wax approached. No bow or nod, just the mask lift. Among this people, perhaps that was the same thing—as behind him, the other airmen did the same.

“Mighty One,” Allik said to Wax. “May your next fire be known to you.”

“And you, Allik.”

“Oh, it is,” he said with a grin. “For *my* next fire is home, yah?” He looked to Marasi, and then reached up and removed his mask—the broken one, which he had glued. He held it out with two hands, which caused a few gasps behind him.

“*Please*,” Allik said. The word had more accent to it than the way he’d been speaking before.

The captain, who had not lifted her mask to Wax, grew stiff at the gesture. Marasi hesitated, then accepted the mask. “Thank you.”

“Thank you, Miss Marasi,” Allik said. “For life.” He took a flat, unornamented mask from his waist and pulled it on by the leather strap. It was really nothing more than a curved piece of wood with holes for the eyes.

"I look forward to my homecoming, but my next fire after that may be here again. I plan to take you up on your offer to visit this city."

"So long as you bring some more choc," Marasi said, "you can visit any time you like."

Wax smiled, and then the five of them relinquished their weight medallion metalminds to the captain, a formality they'd been instructed was customary. Jordis had already presented Wax with one of each, translation and heat-storing, as a gift for him to keep. Wayne had likely stolen another set, though Wax intended to wait until they were off the ship to ask.

Wax led them down the gangway, Steris on his arm.

"Seriously, Waxillium," Marasi said, walking up beside them. "You need to import that chocolate of theirs. I don't know what they put in it, but it's amazing. You think the airships are going to be big? Wait until you *taste* this stuff."

"Hey," Wayne said, pulling up on his other side, but then twisting his neck to look at the people in the ship behind them. "Marasi, I think that pilot fellow *fancies* you."

"Thank you," Marasi said, "for lending us your brilliant powers of observation, Wayne."

"That could be useful politically," Steris noted.

"Please," Marasi said. "He's practically a *child* compared to me. And don't you snicker."

"I wouldn't dare," Wax said, eyes ahead. He didn't miss how reverently Marasi carried the mask, however.

Ahead, a group of the governor's aides and guards clustered together in a protective bubble, as if they could stave off the weirdness before them—and what it represented—through collective body heat. Aradel himself stood apart, as if he'd pushed out of the group.

Wax strolled up to him, Steris on his arm, and waited.

"Damn," Aradel finally said.

"I *did* warn you," Wax replied.

Aradel shook his head in awe, eyes wide. “Well, maybe this will distract everyone from the disaster you all started in New Seran.”

“Bad?” Steris asked.

Aradel grunted. “Senate’s had my balls over the fire for two days straight, screaming about war and irresponsible leadership. As if I *ever* had any influence over you people.” He started, finally ripping his gaze from the airship, and coughed—as if realizing what he’d just said, and whom he’d said it to.

Wax smiled. Aradel was blunt, but usually displayed more tact than this. You couldn’t go far as a constable without *some* understanding of how to deal with people’s egos.

“Apologies, Lady Harms,” he said. “Ladrian, I need to hear what happened in New Seran. The honest truth of it, from your own mouth.”

“You’ll have it,” Wax promised. “Tomorrow.”

“But—”

“Governor,” Wax said. “I appreciate your position, but you have *no idea* what we’ve been through these last few days. My people need rest. Tomorrow. Please.”

Aradel grunted. “Fine.”

“Did you prepare the thing I requested?” Wax asked.

“It’s below,” Aradel said, turning back toward the airship. “In the penthouse.” The governor took a deep breath, looking at that enormous airship again. Constable-General Reddi had led a group of constables up to accept the transfer of prisoners.

Wax could now see that the ship had landed only *half* on the building. One fan spun lazily, keeping the ship in place. *Likely done that way on purpose,* he thought of the landing, *as a message. The crew wants to remind us that while we might get this technology soon, we’ll still be many years behind them in its use.*

“I think we’ll be fine,” Wax said to Aradel. “If the outer cities had thoughts about attacking us, I suspect this might stall them. Spread the knowledge that an *airship* flew through central Elendel and let me off—then left peaceably."

"We have initial treaties in place, Your Honor," Steris added. "Favorable to us for trade. That should give the hawks pause, and could buy us time to smooth things over."

"Yes, perhaps," Aradel said. "It's going to be a tough metal for the Senate to swallow though, Ladrian. Not the airship itself, but the fact that I'm—apparently—just going to let it fly off." He hesitated. "I haven't told them what you said about the other item."

"Bands of Mourning?" Wax said.

Aradel nodded, too politic to say what Wax was certain he was thinking. *What have you gone and done to me this time, Ladrian?*

"MeLaan?" Wax asked. "Would you mind taking over here?"

"Sure," she said, striding toward them. She wore an outfit borrowed from the Southlanders, a man's breeches and boots that went up to midcalf. She rested an arm on the governor's shoulder.

"Holy One," Aradel said, his voice strained but reverent. He eyed Wax. "You realize precisely how unfair it is to deal with you, when you can fall back on heavenly messengers to talk you out of trouble?"

"That's nothing," Wax said, guiding Steris toward the steps down. "Ask me sometime about the conversation I had with God the last time I died."

"That was vicious," Steris said as they reached the steps.

"Nonsense," Wax said. "He's a politician now. He needs practice being thrown off balance in conversations. Helps him prepare for debates and such."

She eyed him.

"I'll be better," he promised, holding the door open for her. Marasi moved to join them, but Wayne caught her by the arm and shook his head.

"Better?" Steris asked from the stairwell. "So this means no more complaining about parties."

"Of course I'll gripe," Wax said, following her into the stairwell, leaving the others behind. "It's a defining character feature. But I'll try and confine the worst of it to you and Wayne.”

“And I,” Steris said, “shall promise to be properly amazed by your exploits saving everyone from everything.” She smiled at him. “And to always carry a few vials of metal with me, just in case. By the way, where are we going?”

He grinned, guiding her down to the top floor of the skyscraper, a regal penthouse that—currently—was unoccupied, the tenants having moved to Elmsdel for an extended holiday. Seated in a chair in the hall outside the apartment proper was a tired-looking man in the garb of a Survivorist priest, his formal mistcloak—really more of a shawl—worn over robes adorned with stitching up the sleeves representing scars.

Steris looked to Wax, curious.

“I was wondering, Steris,” Wax said, “if you’d be willing to be my bride.”

“I’ve already agreed—”

“Yes, but last time I asked with an expectation of a contract,” Wax said. “It was the lord of a house asking a woman of means for a union. Well, that request stands, and thank you. But I’m asking again. It’s important to me.

“Will you be my bride? I want to be married to you. Right now, before the Survivor and that priest. Not because words on a paper say we have to, but because we want to.” He took her by the hand, and spoke more softly. “I’m painfully tired of being alone, Steris. It’s time I admitted that. And you … well, you’re incredible. You truly are.”

Steris started sniffling. She pulled her hand free of his and wiped her eyes.

“Is that … good crying or bad?” Wax asked. All these years dealing with women, and he still couldn’t tell the difference sometimes.

“Well, this wasn’t on any of my lists, you see.”

“Ah.” He felt his heart lurch.

“And,” she continued, “I can’t remember a time when I missed something for one of my lists, only to have it be so wonderful.” She nodded, red-nosed and sniffly. “And it is. Thank you, Lord Waxillium.” She paused. “But tonight! So soon? Don’t the others deserve to attend a wedding?”

“They *did* attend one,” Wax said. “It’s not our fault there wasn’t a marriage at the end. So … what do you think? I mean, if you’re tired from the trip, don’t let me pressure you. I just thought—”

In response, she kissed him.

EPILOGUE

Marasi found it invigorating to work by candlelight. Perhaps it was the primordial danger of it. Electric lights felt safe, contained, harnessed—but an open flame, well, that was something raw. Alive. A little spark of fury which, if released, could destroy her and everything she worked on.

She worked with a lot of such sparks these days.

Spread on her desk in the octant constabulary headquarters were notes, files, interviews. She'd been present for most of them over the last two weeks, advising Constable-General Reddi. The two of them worked so closely these days, it was sometimes hard to remember how difficult he'd been to her during her early days in the constabulary.

Though Suit himself hadn't broken, many of his men had talked. They knew just enough to be infuriating. They'd been recruited from among the dissident young men of the outer cities—their ears stuffed with stories of the Survivor and his fight against imperial rule. They'd been trained in cities like Rashekin and Bilming, far from central rule. In closed compounds that were much more extensive than anyone had known.

Aradel and the others had focused on these details. Troops, timetables, technology—like the long-distance speaking device Waxillium had stolen from Lady Kelesina's mansion. They geared up for war, all the while talking peace.

They were scared, and legitimately so. Decades of not-so-benign neglect had created this snarl. Hopefully it could still be peacefully untangled. Marasi left that to politicians. She cut through the jingoism, the rhetoric, and turned her attention to something else. Stories among the men of something unusual, beyond the rumors of airships and new Allomantic metals.

She held up one sheet covered in notes. Half mentions, admissions made with sideways glances, always spoken of in whispers. Tales of men with red eyes who visited in the night. She added the stories to her files of research about Trell, the ancient god that people were somehow worshipping again. A god that had crafted spikes to corrupt the kandra Paalm, and whose name was on the lips of many of the prisoners.

She'd spent months researching, and so far felt like she knew nothing. But she *would* find answers, one way or another.

* * *

Suit's captors thought to shock him with the austerity of his quarters. A common cell in the prison's nethers, with a bucket for facilities and one blanket on the bed. A tired, pointless tactic. As if he'd known only rose petals and feather beds in his life; as if he'd never slept on a stone slab.

Well, they would see. Anything could be an advantage. In this case, it was a chance to prove himself. He would not break, and they would see.

So it was that he wasn't at all surprised when, after two weeks of captivity, the door to the corridor outside his cell clicked open one night and a stranger stalked in. Male this time, with a ragged beard and wild hair. A beggar stolen off the street, Suit guessed.

You could tell them by the way they walked. Never a stroll, never leisurely. Always fast, determined. Purposeful.

Of course, the softly glowing red eyes were another sign. So far as Suit had been able to determine, Waxillium and his fools had no knowledge of these creatures. They didn't understand, couldn't understand.

The Set had Faceless Immortals of its own.

Suit stood, pulling down the sleeves of his prisoner’s jumpsuit and swiping the wrinkles from his shoulders. “Two weeks is longer than I expected.”

“Our timeline is not yours.”

“I was not complaining,” Suit said. “Merely observing. I am perfectly willing to wait upon Trell’s pleasure.”

“Are you?” the Immortal asked. “It is our understanding that you push for an acceleration.”

“I was merely stating my perspective,” Suit said. “So that a proper discourse can be engaged.”

The creature studied him through the bars. “You didn’t break or spill secrets.”

“I did not.”

“We are impressed.”

“Thank you.”

Advantage. Even two weeks in prison can be used to prove a point.

“The timeline will be accelerated, as you have requested,” the Immortal said.

“Excellent!”

The creature reached into its pocket and removed a device like a small package wrapped in wires. One of Irich’s early attempts at creating an explosive device from the metal that powered the airships. It had proven ineffective, barely more explosive than dynamite, when they needed something that could end cities.

“What is that?” Suit asked, growing nervous.

“Our accelerated pace will no longer require the Set to have its full hierarchy.”

“But you need us!” Suit said. “To rule, to manage civilization on—”

“No longer. Recent advances have made civilization here too dangerous. Allowing it to continue risks further advances we cannot control, and so we have decided to remove life on this sphere instead. Thank you for your service; it has been accepted. You will be allowed to serve in another Realm."

"But—"

The creature engaged the explosive device, blowing itself—and Suit—to oblivion.

* * *

Wax started awake. Had that been an explosion?

He looked around the quiet bedroom suite of the tower penthouse. Steris curled up on the bed next to him, perfectly still in her sleep, though she held lightly to his arm. She often did that, as if afraid to let go and risk all this ending.

Looking at her there in the starlight, he was shocked by the deep affection he felt for her. His surprise didn't concern him. He could remember many a morning waking next to Lessie, feeling that same surprise. Amazement at his good fortune, astonishment at the depth of his own emotion.

He gently lifted her hand away, then pulled the sheet up around her before slipping from the bed and strolling bare-chested across the room toward the balcony.

They'd stayed here in the penthouse through the honeymoon, rather than returning to the mansion. It felt like a good way to have a new beginning, and Wax was starting to think he might like to relocate here more permanently. He was a new person for what seemed like the hundredth time in his life, and this was a new age. This was no longer an era of quiet mansions and smoking-room conversations; it was an era of bold skyscrapers and vibrant downtown politics.

The mists were out, curling around outside, though the skyscraper was tall enough he thought he could see stars and the Red Rip through that mist. He moved to push open the doors and step out onto the balcony, but paused, noticing his dressing table, upon which Drewton had set out a row of objects. The valet had gone through Wax's things, from his pockets and from his possessions recovered from the hotel in New Seran. Drewton probably wanted to know which should be kept, and which disposed of.

Wax smiled, brushing his fingers over the wrinkled cravat he'd worn to the party with Steris. He remembered tossing it to the ground as he changed to trousers and mistcoat in his room, prior to their quick escape from the city. Drewton had laid it out, along with a napkin from the party, monogrammed, and even a bottle cap he'd swiped in case he needed something to Push on. But Drewton had set it out on its own little cloth as if it might be the most important thing in the world.

Wax shook his head, resting a hand on the door out to the balcony. Then he froze and looked back at the table.

It was right there. The coin he'd been given by the beggar, shining in the faint starlight. Drewton must have found it in his pocket. Wax reached out, hesitated a moment, and then slipped it from the table before stepping out into the mist.

Could it be? he wondered, holding up the coin. Two different metals. One was silvery. Could that be nicrosil? The other was copper. A Feruchemical metal. Though the pattern printed on the face wasn't the same, and the coin itself was smaller, this didn't look all that different from one of the Southerner medallions.

As soon as he thought of it—as soon as he knew what it might do—the metalmind started working, and he found a store within him, a reserve he could tap. Wax gasped.

They called them copperminds. A very special kind of Feruchemical storage. One that stored memories.

He tapped it.

Immediately, Wax was in a different place. A barren land, with no one in sight and only dust blowing around him. It was a difficult perspective to experience, for only half of the viewer's eyesight was normal.

The other was all in blue, lines everywhere. The vision of a man spiked through the eye.

The figure crossed those desolate reaches, passing half-tended crops left to die and rattle in the wind. Ahead lay a town—or the remnants of one.

He heard his own boots on the dirty rock, the wind blowing, and felt cold. He continued on into the town, passing foundations marked by old, burned-out fires. Somehow, he knew that the inhabitants here—as in other villages and towns he'd passed—had torn down their own walls for firewood, in desperation to survive.

Bodies lay in the street, stripped. Their clothing had been taken for burning after they'd frozen in what most men would consider only mildly cold weather.

Ahead stood a bunkerlike stone dwelling. Long and narrow, it reminded him of something—not something Wax knew, but a memory in the mind of the man storing this experience. A memory of something long ago that flickered in his consciousness, then was lost in a moment.

The traveler continued, stepping up to the doorway, which was open. They'd burned the door.

Inside, a mass of people huddled together for warmth, wrapped uselessly in blankets. No fires left.

They'd burned even their masks.

The traveler moved among them, drawing some concern, though most people stared with dull eyes. Awaiting death. He found the leaders near the center, the elders, aged and wearing cloth masks on their faces—the only things they had left. One ancient woman looked up at him and lifted her mask.

He saw her normally in one world, and outlined in blue in another. The traveler reached out and took the woman by the shoulder, kneeled down, and whispered a single word.

Wax came out of that memory with a shock, dropping the coin, startled and stepping back.

The coin plinged against the balcony and settled to a stop near his feet.

That arm … That *arm*. Lined with a network of scars layered atop one another, as if made by scraping the skin time and time again. The haunting word he’d spoken echoed in Wax’s mind.

“Survive.”

POSTSCRIPT

Marasi, Wax, and Wayne will return in *The Lost Metal*, the epic finale of Mistborn: Era Two. I plan to release this after *Oathbringer*, the third volume of the Stormlight Archive, which I'm hard at work writing at this moment.

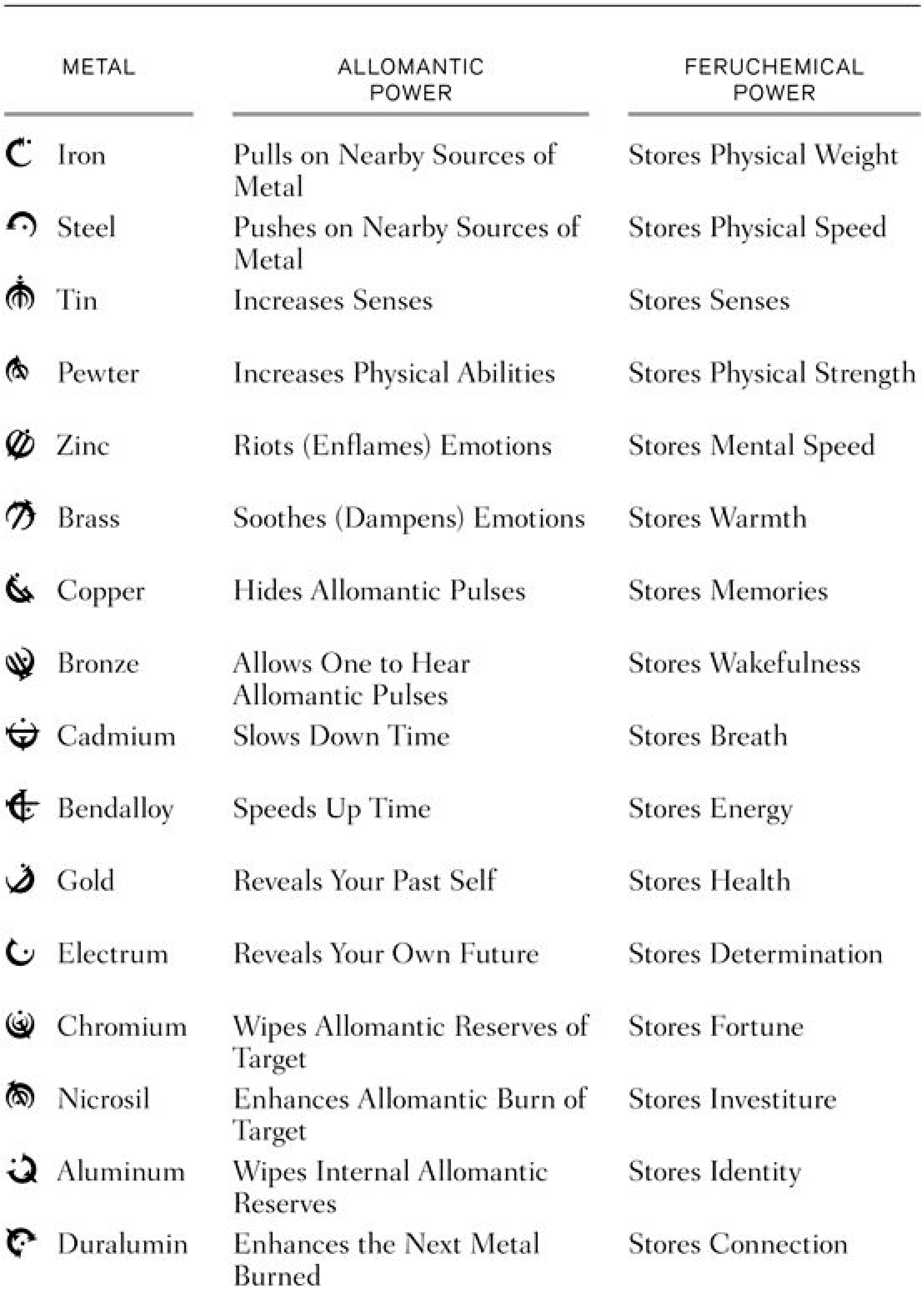
To tide you over until *Oathbringer*, I have just released a special digital-only novella that is intended to be read after *The Bands of Mourning*, though it takes place during the events of the original Mistborn Trilogy. Ten years in the making, *Mistborn: Secret History* might answer a few of your questions.

There's always another secret.

BRANDON SANDERSON
January 2016

ARS ARCANUM

METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART



METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER
Iron	Pulls on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Weight
Steel	Pushes on Nearby Sources of Metal	Stores Physical Speed
Tin	Increases Senses	Stores Senses
Pewter	Increases Physical Abilities	Stores Physical Strength
Zinc	Riots (Enflames) Emotions	Stores Mental Speed
Brass	Soothes (Dampens) Emotions	Stores Warmth
Copper	Hides Allomantic Pulses	Stores Memories
Bronze	Allows One to Hear Allomantic Pulses	Stores Wakefulness
Cadmium	Slows Down Time	Stores Breath
Bendalloy	Speeds Up Time	Stores Energy
Gold	Reveals Your Past Self	Stores Health
Electrum	Reveals Your Own Future	Stores Determination
Chromium	Wipes Allomantic Reserves of Target	Stores Fortune
Nicrosil	Enhances Allomantic Burn of Target	Stores Investiture
Aluminum	Wipes Internal Allomantic Reserves	Stores Identity
Duralumin	Enhances the Next Metal Burned	Stores Connection

LIST OF METALS

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of his or her metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their spiritual sense of identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them it is not yet well understood. Aluminum itself and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluids intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer’s metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals’ power. Mistings who can burn Duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connecter Ferrings can store spiritual connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people’s awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the sensitivity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the sensitivity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their sensitivity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or directed across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally these are spoken of as the "Metallic Arts," though there are other names for them.

Allomancy is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their Spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn't actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn't much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the "God Metals" locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, however, the other metals are not in wide use.

Feruchemy is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren’t spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the interbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if one could make metalminds out of alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

Hemalurgy is widely unknown in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world’s rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra, who (for the most part) serve Harmony.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many throughout history have maligned it as an “evil” art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great import to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are many possibilities for its use.

COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One needs look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called “Twinborn.” The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nazrilof

Brandon Sanderson grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. He lives in Utah with his wife and children and teaches creative writing at Brigham Young University. He is the author of such bestsellers as the Mistborn® trilogy and its sequels, *The Alloy of Law* and *Shadows of Self;* the Stormlight Archive novels *The Way of Kings* and *Words of Radiance;* and other novels, including *The Rithmatist* and *Steelheart*. In 2013, he won a Hugo Award for Best Novella for *The Emperor's Soul*, set in the world of his acclaimed first novel, *Elantris*. Additionally, he was chosen to complete Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time® sequence. For behind-the-scenes information on all of Brandon Sanderson's books, visit brandonsanderson.com. Or sign up for email updates here.

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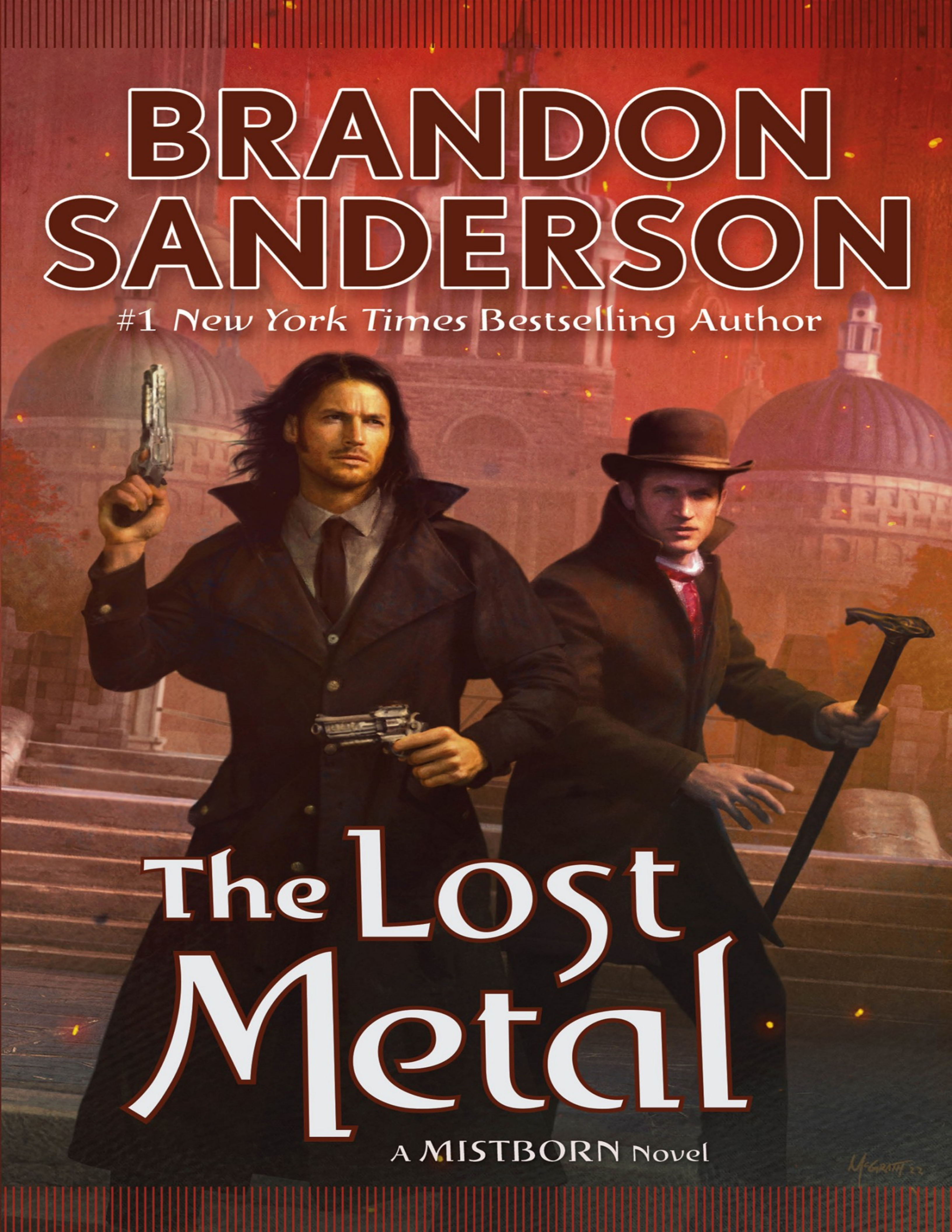

BRANDON SANDERSON

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

The Lost Metal

A MISTBORN Novel

THE LOST METAL

A MISTBORN NOVEL

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FOR ETHAN SKARSTEDT

Who is a man of Honor.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sixteen years ago, sitting in a dim booth at a local steakhouse, I first pitched to my wife an audacious idea I'd been developing: taking an epic fantasy world, and then expanding it through different eras into the future. I'd seen mashups of fantasy and science fiction before, and I'd seen epic fantasy inch toward industrial technology. But I'd never seen an author develop a world in quite this way—giving an expansive view of a planet moving into the future, using the lore of earlier book series as the foundation of religion and myth.

It was a gamble. Readers tend to like their genres well delineated. Here, I was pitching something that broke apart those genre lines in ways that historically did not sell well. Yet I was convinced that the larger-scale project (the vision of a planet and its magic throughout various eras) was worth the risk. That brings us here, to the final book of Era Two of Mistborn and my grand experiment with genre.

Whether I've been successful or not so far is up to you, the reader. But I can say this: I certainly wouldn't have gotten where I am without the help of a large number of people. I know these acknowledgments are a bit of a blur of names, but I'm so grateful to each and every one of them. These are the people who, when I come up with some new audacious plan, don't roll their eyes—they instead roll up their sleeves and make it happen.

For this book, Joshua Bilmes did his usual excellent job as my agent. On his team, Susan Velazquez and Christina Zobel were also a great deal of help, managing all the different overseas contracts and subagents.

Speaking of across the pond, I had some extra-special help from Gillian Redfearn on this book—she's my UK editor, and took the lead on this book performing the line edit work that often is shouldered by the US publisher. She did a fantastic job, and I'm lucky to have her help. In addition, I'd like to thank Emad Akhtar and Brendan Durkin at Gollancz in the UK, as well as my UK agents, John Berlyne and Stevie Finegan at the Zeno Agency.

Over in the US, Devi Pillai was the lead editor on this project, offering her excellent editorial eye for story and character as she always does. Also at Tor, I'd like to thank Molly McGhee, Tessa Villanueva, Lucille Rettino, Eileen Lawrence, Alexis Saarela, Heather Saunders, Rafal Gibek, Felipe Cruz, Amelie Littell, and Hayley Jozwiak. The copyeditor was our longtime collaborator in that field, Terry McGarry.

As for the audiobook, the irreplaceable Michael Kramer is once again giving voice to my characters and making me sound good. I appreciate you, Michael. Thank you for all you do. At Macmillian Audio, I'd like to thank Steve Wagner, Samantha Edelson, and Drew Kilman.

Increasingly these days, my books take a ton of extra work in the art department. So we'll give these gunslingers their own section—even though some of them could overlap with other sections. For instance, Peter Lutjen is Tor's art director, and deserves a hearty thanks. Chris McGrath did our jacket illustration. My internal art director at Dragonsteel is □□□—the artist formerly known as Isaac Stewart. He did the maps, symbols, and a lot of the work (including the writing) on the broadsheets. Keep an eye out for books by □□□ in the future. (Yes, I did just make up that whole symbol thing. I can do that. I have a literary license.) Our good friend and longtime collaborator Ben McSweeney did most of the art you find in the broadsheets. Rachael Lynn Buchanan was our art assistant, and Jennifer Neal provided some additional help in creating the broadsheets.

In my company, Dragonsteel, our in-house Editorial department is headed by the Insatiable Peter Ahlstrom, with Karen Ahlstrom running continuity and various additional editorial help being provided by Betsey Ahlstrom. And Kristy S. Gilbert has just come on as our Production Editor.

Dragonsteel's Fulfillment and Events team is headed by Kara Stewart, and that team includes Christi Jacobsen, Lex Willhite, Kellyn Neumann, Mem Grange, Michael Bateman, Joy Allen, Katy Ives, Richard Rubert, Sean VanBuskirk, Isabel Chrisman, Tori Mecham, Ally Reep, Jacob Chrisman, Alex Lyon, and Owen Knowlton.

Our in-house Publicity and Marketing team is headed by Adam Horne, with Jeremy Palmer as our marketing director. Our Operations team is headed by Mat "My name is actually Matt with two T's" Hatch, with Jane Horne, Emma Tan-Stoker, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Makena Saluone, and Hazel Cummings.

And, of course, my wonderful wife, Emily Sanderson, is our COO at Dragonsteel. And is the cutest person on this list.

Less cute, but still very helpful, are the members of the writing group. On this book they include: Kaylynn ZoBell, Peter Ahlstrom, Karen Ahlstrom, Alan Layton, Eric James Stone, Darci Stone, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Emily Sanderson, and Ben "Rick Stranger" Olsen. Also, of course, there is Ethan Skarstedt—to whom this book is dedicated. The real-life inspiration for Skar from Bridge Four, Ethan has been helping me get my soldiering and gunplay right for some twenty years now. Many thanks, Ethan, for helping me pretend I know what I'm talking about.

Mi'chelle Walker created our beta reader feedback database, which was super useful. The beta readers included Trae Cooper, Tim Challener, Ted Herman, Suzanne Musin, Sumejja Muratagić-Tadić, Paige Phillips, Shannon Nelson, Sean VanBuskirk, Ross Newberry, Rosemary Williams, Richard Fife, Rahul Pantula, Poonam Desai, Philip Vorwaller, Paige Vest, Mi'chelle Walker, Megan Kanne, Matt Wiens, Mark Axies Lindberg, Marnie Peterson, Lyndsey Luther, Linnea Lindstrom, Lauren McCaffrey, Kendra Wilson, Kendra Alexander, Kellyn Neumann, Kalyani Poluri, Joy Allen, Joshua Harkey, Jory "Chief Chicken Head Scratcher" Phillips, Jessie Lake, Jessica Ashcraft, Jennifer Neal, Ian McNatt, Chris "Gunner" McGrath, Gary Singer, Frankie Jerome, Evgeni "Argent" Kirilov, Erika Kuta Marler, Eric Lake, Drew McCaffrey, Deana Covel Whitney, David Fallon, David Behrens, Darci Cole, Craig Hanks, Christina Goodman, Christopher Cottingham, Chana Oshira Block, Brian T. Hill, Brandon Cole, Lingting "Botanica" Xu, Bob Kluttz, Ben Marrow, Becca Reppert, Bao Pham, Anthony Acker, Alyx Hoge, Alice Arneson, Alexis Horizon, Aaron Biggs, Joe Deardeuff, Rob West, and Jayden King.

Gamma readers included many of the above, plus Sam Baskin, Glen Vogelaar, Dale Wiens, Billy Todd, Ari Kufer, Matthew Sorensen, Ram

Shoham, Eliyahu Berelowitz Levin, and Aaron Ford.

We got some detailed help from a particular group on this book, people who I have asked to keep an eye on my magic systems and offer feedback on where I might need more explanations or might be in danger of contradicting myself. We're calling them our Magic System Continuity team, but I'm officially dubbing them Arcanists going forward. They are Joshua Harkey, Eric Lake, Evgeni Kirilov, David Behrens, Ian McNatt, and Ben Marrow.

I would like to extend a special thanks to my good friends Kalyani and Rahul, longtime beta readers, who have been encouraging me for years to look into Indian mythology and lore for inspiration for fantasy storytelling. They provided excellent consultation in this book on a certain character who the three of us worked on together to try to expand the Cosmere a little bit in this direction.

Thank you to everyone on this list. And, of course, to the readers. Mistborn has been a strange journey these last sixteen years, and I feel it's about to get even stranger—as well as (with a little luck) even more incredible.

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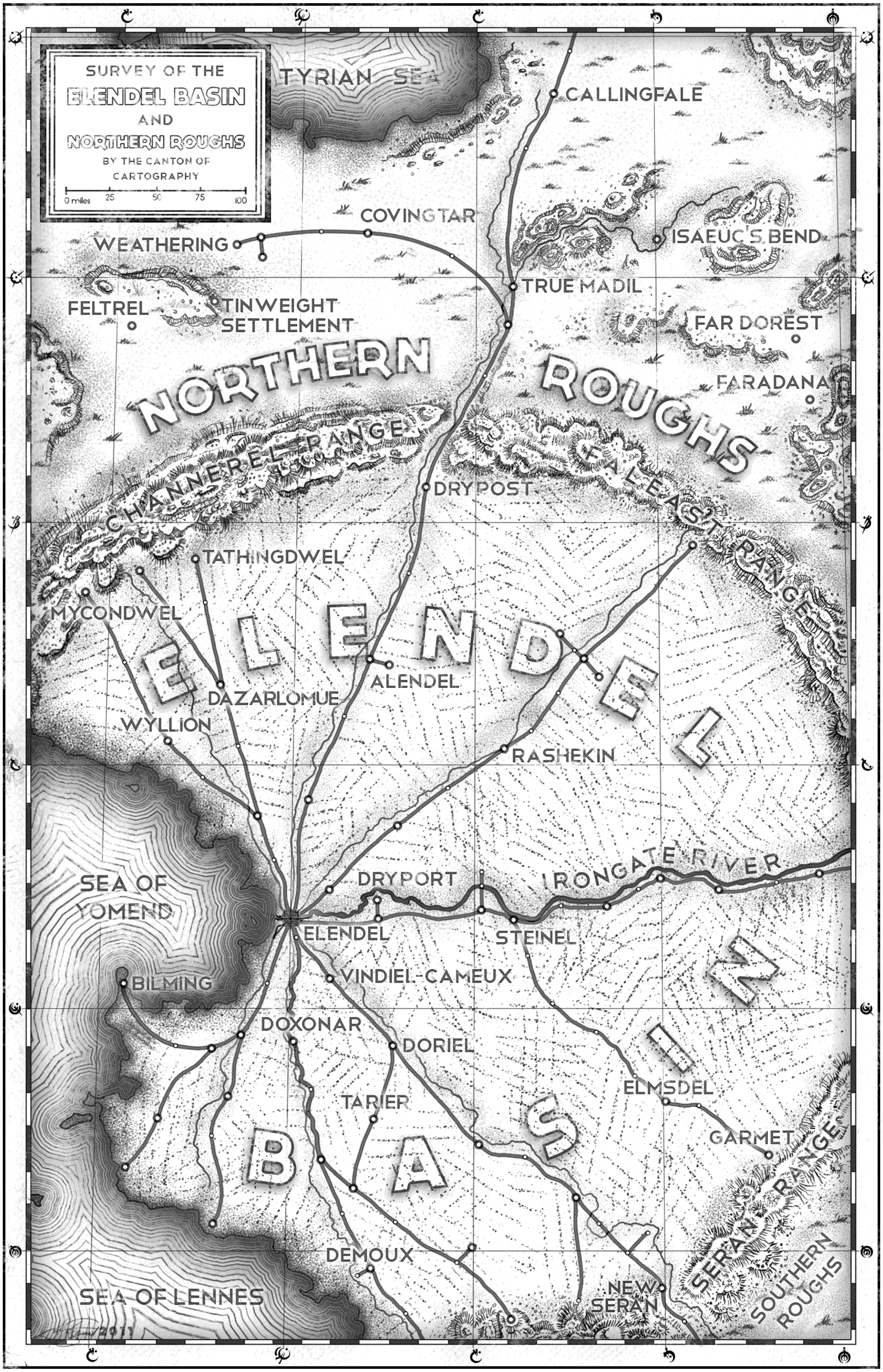
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FARADANA
CHANNEREL RANGE
DRYPOST
FALEAST RANGE
TATHINGDWEL
MYCONDWEL
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ALENDEL
DAZARLOMUE
WYLLION
RASHEKIN
SEA OF YOMEND
DRYPORT
IRONGATE RIVER
ELENDEL
STEINEL
BILMING
VINDIEL-CAMEUX
DOXONAR
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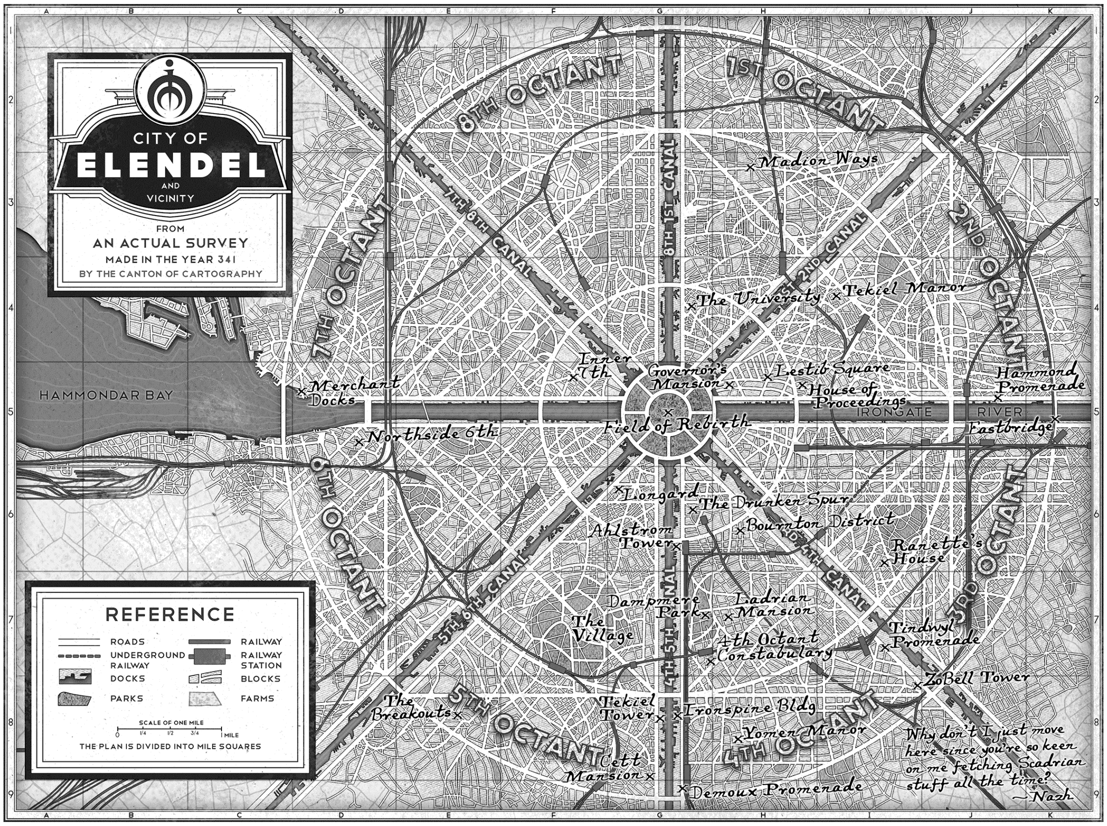
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4TH 5TH CANAL
5TH 6TH CANAL
Madion Ways
The University
Tekiel Manor
Inner 7th
Governor's Mansion
Lestib Square
House of Proceedings
Hammond Promenade
Merchant Docks
HAMMONDAR BAY
Northside 6th
Field of Rebirth
IRONGATE RIVER
Eastbridge
Longard
The Drunken Spur
Ahlstrom Tower
Bournton District
Ranette's House
Dampmere Park
Ladrian Mansion
The Village
4th Octant Constabulary
Tindwyl Promenade
ZoBell Tower
The Breakouts
Tekiel Tower
Ironspine Bldg
Yomen Manor
Cett Mansion
Demoux Promenade
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Why don't I just move
here since you're so keen
on me fetching Scadrian
stuff all the time?
—Nazh

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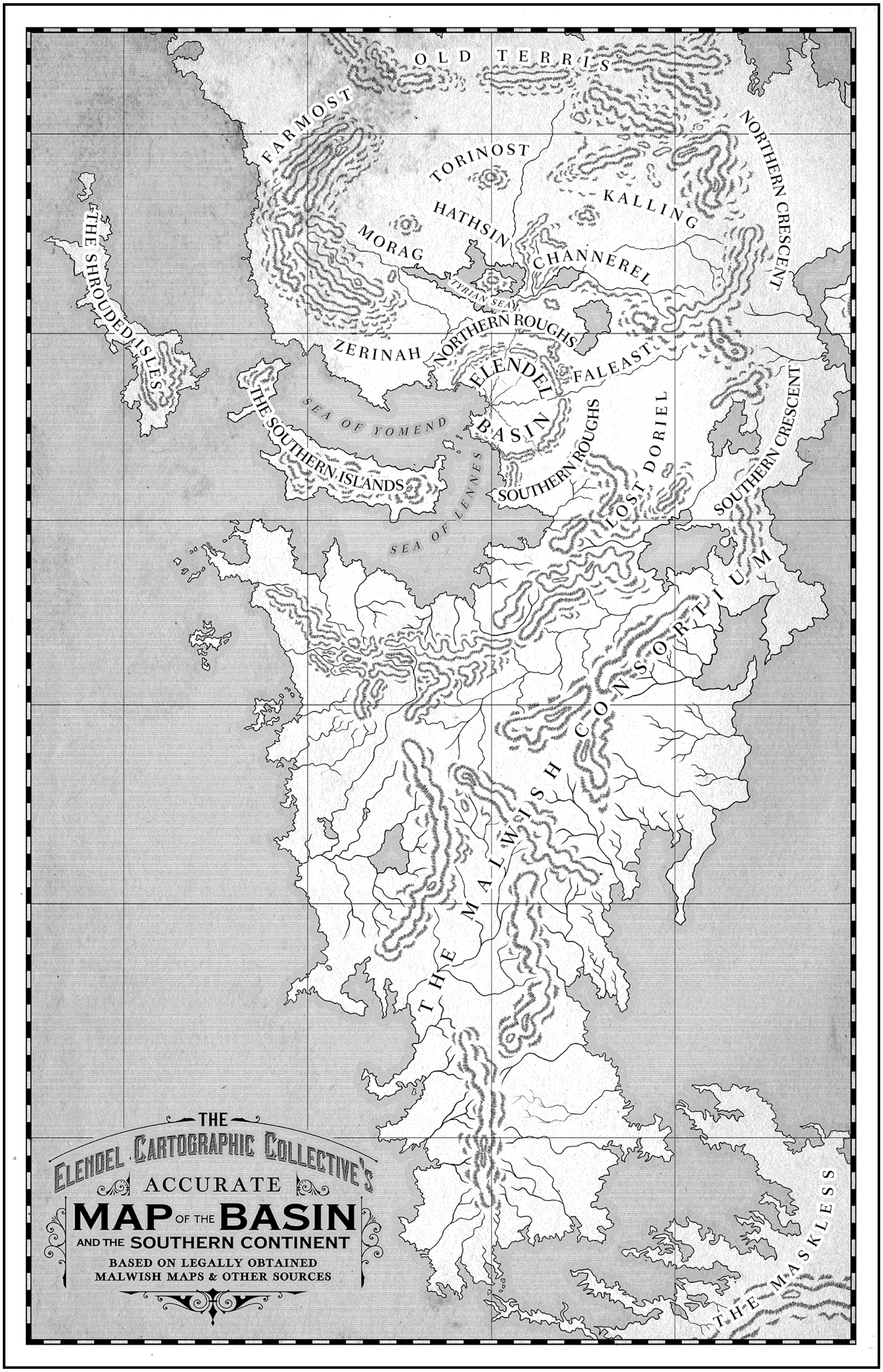
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ELENDEL CARTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIVE'S
ACCURATE
MAP OF THE BASIN
AND THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT
BASED ON LEGALLY OBTAINED
MALWISH MAPS & OTHER SOURCES

OLD TERRIS
FARMOST
TORINOST
KALLING
NORTHERN CRESCENT
HATHSIN
MORAG
CHANNEREL
TYRIAN SEA
THE SHROUDED ISLES
NORTHERN ROUGHS
ZERINAH
ELENDEL
BASIN
FALEAST
SEA OF YOMEND
THE SOUTHERN ISLANDS
SOUTHERN ROUGHS
LOST DORIEL
SOUTHERN CRESCENT
SEA OF LENNES
THE MALWISH CONSORTIUM
THE MASKLESS

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PROLOGUE

Wayne knew about beds. Other kids in Tinweight Settlement had them. A bed sounded much better than a mat on the ground—especially one he had to share with his ma when the nights were cold, because they didn't have any coal.

Plus there were monsters under beds.

Yeah, he'd heard stories of mistwraiths. They'd hide unner your bed and steal the faces of people you knew. Which made beds soft and squishy on top, with someone underneath you could talk to. Sounded like rustin' heaven.

Other kids were scared of mistwraiths, but Wayne figured they just didn't know how to negotiate properly. He could make friends with something what lived unner a bed. You just had to give it something it wanted, like someone else to eat.

Anyway, no bed for him. And no proper chairs. They had a table, built by Uncle Gregr. Back before he got crushed by a billion rocks in a landslide and mushed into a pulp what couldn't hit people no more. Wayne kicked the table sometimes, in case Gregr's spirit was watching and was fond of it. Rusts knew there was nothing else in this one-window home Uncle Gregr had cared about.

Best Wayne had was a stool, so he sat on that and played with his cards—dealing hands and hiding cards up his sleeve—as he waited. This was a nervous time of day. Every evening he feared she wouldn't come home. Not because she didn't love him. Ma was a burst of sweet spring flowers in a sewage pit of a world. But because one day Pa hadn't come home. One day Uncle Gregr—Wayne kicked the table—hadn't come home. So Ma …

Don't think about it, Wayne thought, bungling his shuffle and spilling cards over the table and floor. *And don't look. Not until you see the light.*

He could feel the mine out there; nobody wanted to live nexta it, so Wayne and his ma did.

He thought of something else, on purpose. The pile of laundry by the wall that he'd finished washing earlier. That had been Ma's old job what didn't pay well enough. Now he did it while she pushed minecarts.

Wayne didn't mind the work. Got to try on all the different clothes—whether they were from old gramps or young women—and pretend to be them. His ma had caught him a few times and grown angry. Her exasperation still baffled him. Why *wouldn't* you try them all on? That's what clothes was for. It wasn't nothing weird.

Besides, sometimes folks left stuff in their pockets. Like decks of cards.

He fumbled the shuffle again, and as he gathered the cards up he did *not* look out the window, even though he could feel the mine. That gaping artery, like the hole in someone's neck, red from the inside and spurting out light like blood and fire. His ma had to go dig at the beast's insides, searchin' for metals, then escape its anger. You could only get lucky so many times.

Then he spotted it. Light. With relief, he glanced out the window and saw someone walking along the path, holding up a lantern to illuminate her way. Wayne scrambled to hide the cards under the mat, then lay on top, feigning sleep when the door opened. She'd have seen his light go out of course, but she appreciated the effort he put into pretending.

She settled on the stool, and Wayne cracked an eye. His ma wore trousers and a buttoned shirt, her hair up, her clothing and face smudged. She sat staring at the flame in the lantern, watching it flicker and dance, and her face seemed more hollow than it had been before. Like someone was taking a pickaxe to her cheeks.

That mine's eatin' her away, he thought. *It hasn't gobbled her up like it did Pa, but it's gnawing on her.*

Ma blinked, then fixated on something else. A card he’d left on the table. Aw, hell.

She picked it up, then looked right at him. He didn’t pretend to be asleep no more. She’d dump water on him.

“Wayne,” she said, “where did you get these cards?”

“Don’t remember.”

“Wayne…”

“Found ’em,” he said.

She held out her hand, and he reluctantly pulled the deck out and handed it over. She tucked the card she’d found into the box. Damn. She’d spend a day searching Tinweight for whoever had “lost” them. Well, he wouldn’t have her losing more sleep on account of him.

“Tark Vestingdow,” Wayne mumbled. “They was inna pocket of his overalls.”

“Thank you,” she said softly.

“Ma, I’ve *gotta* learn cards. That way I can earn a good livin’ and care for us.”

“A good living?” she asked. “With cards?”

“Don’t worry,” he said quickly. “I’ll cheat! Can’t make a livin’ if you don’t win, see.”

She sighed, rubbing her temples.

Wayne glanced at the cards in their stack. “Tark,” he said. “He’s Terris. Like Pa was.”

“Yes.”

“Terris people always do what they’re told. So what’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing’s wrong with you, love,” she said. “You just haven’t got a good parent to guide you.”

“Ma,” he said, scrambling off the mat to take her arm. “Don’t talk like that. You’re a *great* ma.”

She hugged him to her side, but he could feel her tension. “Wayne,” she asked, “did you take Demmy’s pocketknife?”

“He talked?” Wayne said. “Rust that rustin’ bastard!”

“Wayne! Don’t swear like that.”

“Rust that rusting bastard!” he said in a railworker’s accent instead.

He grinned at her innocently, and was rewarded with a smile she couldn’t hide. Silly voices always made her happy. Pa had been good at them, but Wayne was better. Particularly now that Pa was dead and couldn’t say them no more.

But then her smile faded. “You can’t take things what don’t belong to you, Wayne. That’s somethin’ thieves do.”

“I don’t wanna be a thief,” Wayne said softly, putting the pocketknife on the table beside the cards. “I want to be a good boy. It just … happens.”

She hugged him closer. “You *are* a good boy. You’ve *always* been a good boy.”

When she said it, he believed it.

“Do you want a story, love?” she asked.

“I’m too old for stories,” he lied, desperately wishing she’d tell one anyway. “I’m *eleven.* One more year and I can drink at the tavern.”

“What? Who told you that!”

“Dug.”

“Dug is *nine.*”

“Dug knows stuff.”

“*Dug* is *nine.*”

“So you’re sayin’ I’ll have to snitch booze for him next year, ’cuz he can’t get it himself yet?” He met her eyes, then started snickering.

He helped her get dinner—cold oatmeal with some beans in it. At least it wasn’t *only* beans. Then he snuggled into his blankets on the mat, pretending he was a child again to listen. It was easy to feign that. He still had the clothes after all.

“This is the tale,” she said, “of Blatant Barm, the Unwashed Bandit.”

“Oooh…” Wayne said. “A *new* one?”

His mother leaned forward, wagging her spoon toward him as she spoke. “He was the worst of them all, Wayne. Baddest, meanest, *stinkiest* bandit. He never bathed.”

“’Cuz it takes too much work to get properly dirty?”

“No, because he … Wait, it’s *work* to get dirty?”

“Gotta roll around in it, you see.”

“Why in Harmony’s name would you do that?”

"To think like the ground," Wayne said.

"To…" She smiled. "Oh, Wayne. You're so precious."

"Thanks," he said. "Why ain't you told me of this Blatant Barm before? If he was so bad wouldn't he be the first one you told stories about?"

"You were too young," she said, sitting back. "And the story too frightening."

Ooooh … This was going to be a *good* one. Wayne bounced up and down. "Who got 'im? Was it a lawman?"

"It was Allomancer Jak."

"Him?" Wayne said with a groan.

"I thought you liked him."

Well, all the kids did. Jak was new and interesting, and had been solving all kinds of tough crimes this last year. Least according to Dug.

"But Jak always brings the bad guys in," Wayne complained. "He never shoots a single one."

"Not this time," Ma said, digging into her oatmeal. "He knew Blatant Barm was the worst. Killer to the core. Even Barm's sidekicks—Gud the Killer and Noways Joe—were *ten* times worse than any other bandit that ever walked the Roughs."

"Ten *times*?" Wayne said.

"Yup."

"That's a lot! Almost double!"

His ma frowned for a moment, but then leaned forward again. "They'd robbed the payroll. Taking not just the money from the fat men in Elendel, but the wages of the common folk."

"Bastards!" Wayne said.

"Wayne!"

"Fine! Regular old turds then!"

Again she hesitated. "Do you … know what the word 'bastard' means?"

"It's a bad turd, the kind you get when you've *really* got to go, but you hold it in too long."

"You know that because…"

"Dug told me."

"Of course he did. Well, Jak, he wouldn't stand for stealing from the common folk of the Roughs. Being a bandit is one thing, but everyone knows you take the money what goes *toward* the city.

"Unfortunately, Blatant Barm, he knew the area real well. So he rode off into the most difficult land in the Roughs—and he left one of his two sidekicks to guard each of the key spots along the way. Fortunately, Jak was the bravest of men. And the strongest."

"If he was the bravest and strongest," Wayne said, "why was he a lawman? He could be a bandit, and nobody could stop him!"

"What's harder, love?" she asked. "Doing what's right or doing what's wrong?"

"Doing what's right."

"So who gets stronger?" Ma asked. "The fellow what does the easy thing, or what does the hard thing?"

Huh. He nodded. Yeah. Yeah, he could see that.

She moved the lantern closer to her face, making it shine as she spoke. "Jak's first test was the River Human, the vast waterway marking the border with what had once been koloss lands. The waters moved at the speed of a train; it was the fastest river in the whole world—and it was full of rocks. Gud the Killer had set up there, across the river, to watch for lawmen. He had such a good eye and steady hand that he could shoot a fly off a man at three hundred paces."

"Why'd you want to do that?" Wayne asked. "Better to shoot 'im right *in* the fly. That's gotta hurt something bad."

"Not that kind of fly, love," Ma said.

"So what did Jak do?" Wayne asked. "Did he sneak up? Not very lawman-like to sneak. I don't think they do that. I'll bet he didn't sneak."

"Well…" Ma said.

Wayne clutched his blanket, waiting.

"Jak was a *better* shot," she whispered. "When Gud the Killer sighted on him, Jak shot him first—clean across the river."

"How'd Gud die?" Wayne whispered.

"By bullet, love."

"Through the eye?" Wayne said.

“Suppose.”

“And so Gud lined up a shot and Jak did likewise—but Jak shot first, hitting Gud *straight* through the sights into the eye! Right, Ma!”

“Yup.”

“And his head exploded,” Wayne said, “like a fruit—the crunchy kind, the shell all *tough* but it’s gooey inside. Is that how it happened?”

“Absolutely.”

“Dang, Ma,” Wayne said. “That’s gruesome. You sure you should be tellin’ me this story?”

“Should I stop?”

“Hell no! How’d Jak get across the water?”

“He flew,” Ma said. She set her bowl aside, oatmeal finished, and gave a flourish with both hands. “Using his Allomantic powers. Jak can fly, and talk to birds, and eat rocks.”

“Wow. Eat *rocks*?”

“Yup. And so he flew over that river. But the next challenge was even worse. The Canyon of Death.”

“Ooooh…” Wayne said. “Bet that place was pretty.”

“Why do you say that?”

“’Cuz nobody’s going to visit a place called ‘Canyon of Death’ unless it’s pretty. But somebody visited it, ’cuz we know the name. So it must be pretty.”

“Beautiful,” Ma said. “A canyon carved through the middle of a bunch of crumbling rock spires—the broken peaks streaked with colors, like they was painted that way. But the place was as deadly as it was beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Wayne said. “Figures.”

“Jak couldn’t fly over this one, for the second of the bandits hid in the canyon. Noways Joe. He was a master of pistols, and could also fly, and turn into a dragon, and eat rocks. If Jak tried to sneak past, Joe would shoot him from behind.”

“That’s the smart way to shoot someone,” Wayne said. “On account of them not bein’ able to shoot back.”

“True,” Ma said. “So Jak didn’t let that happen. He had to go into the canyon—but it was *filled* with *snakes*.”

“Bloody hell!”

“Wayne…”

“Regular old boring hell, then! How many snakes?”

“A million snakes.”

“Bloody hell!”

“But Jak, he was smart,” Ma said. “So he’d thought to bring some snake food.”

“A million bits of snake food?”

“Nah, only one,” she said. “But he got the snakes to fight over it, so they mostly killed each other. And the one what was left was the strongest, naturally.”

“Naturally.”

“So Jak talked it into biting Noways Joe.”

“And so Joe turned purple!” Wayne said. “And bled out his ears! And his bones melted, so the melty bone juice leaked out of his nose! And he collapsed into a puddle of deflated skin, all while hissing and blubbering ’cuz his teeth was melting!”

“Exactly.”

“Dang, Ma. You tell the *best* stories.”

“It gets better,” she said softly, leaning down on the stool, their lantern burning low. “Because the ending has a surprise.”

“What surprise?”

“Once Jak was through the canyon—what now smelled like dead snakes and melted bones—he spotted the final challenge: the Lone Mesa. A giant plateau in the center of an otherwise flat plain.”

“That’s not much of a challenge,” Wayne said. “He could fly to the top.”

“Well he tried to,” she whispered. “But the mesa *was* Blatant Barm.”

“*WHAT?*”

“That’s right,” Ma said. “Barm had joined up with the koloss—the ones that change into big monsters, not the normal ones like old Mrs. Nock. And *they* showed him how to turn into a monster of humongous size. So when Jak tried to land on it, the mesa done gobbled him up.”

Wayne gasped. “And then,” he said, “it mashed him beneath its teeth, crushing his bones like—”

"No," Ma said. "It tried to swallow him. But Jak, he wasn't only smart and a good shot. He was something else."

"What?"

"A big damn pain in the ass."

"Ma! That's swearin'."

"It's okay in stories," Ma said. "Listen, Jak was a pain. He was always going about doing good. Helping people. Making life tough for bad people. Asking questions. He knew exactly how to ruin a bandit's day.

"So as he was swallowed, Jak stretched out his arms and legs, then pushed—making himself a *lump* in Blatant Barm's throat, so the monster couldn't breathe. Monsters like that needs lotsa air, you know. And so, Allomancer Jak done *choked* Barm from the inside. Then, when the monster was dead on the ground, Jak sauntered out down its tongue—like it was some fancy mat set outside a carriage for a rich man."

Whoa. "That's a *good* story, Ma."

She smiled.

"Ma," he said. "Is the story … about the mine?"

"Well," she said, "I suppose we all gotta walk into the beast's mouth now and then. So … maybe, I guess."

"You're like the lawman then."

"Anyone can be," she said, blowing out the lantern.

"Even me?"

"Especially you." She kissed him on the forehead. "You are whatever you want to be, Wayne. You're the wind. You're the stars. You are all endless things."

It was a poem she liked. He liked it too. Because when she said it, he *believed* her. How could he not? Ma didn't lie. So, he snuggled deeper into his blankets and let himself drift off. A lot was wrong in the world, but a few things were right. And as long as she was around, stories meant something. They was real.

Until the next day, when there was another collapse at the mine. That night, his ma didn't come home.

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PART ONE

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1

TWENTY-NINE YEARS LATER

Marasi had never been in a sewer before, but it was exactly as awful as she'd imagined. The stench was incredible, of course. But worse was the way her booted feet would occasionally slip for a heart-stopping moment, threatening to plunge her down into the "mud" underneath.

At least she'd had the foresight to wear a uniform with trousers today, along with knee-high leather work boots. But there was no protection from the scent, the feel, or—unfortunately—the sound of it. When she took a step—map in one hand, rifle in the other—each boot would pull free with a *squelch* of mythical proportions. It would have been the worst sound ever, if not overmatched by Wayne's complaining.

"Wax never brought me into a rusting sewer," he muttered, raising the lantern.

"Are there sewers in the Roughs?"

"Well, no," he admitted. "Pastures smell almost as bad, and he did make me march through those. But Marasi, they didn't have *spiders*."

"They probably did," she said, angling the map toward his lantern. "You just couldn't see them."

"Suppose," he grumbled. "But it's worse when you can see the webs. Also there's, you know, the literal sewage."

Marasi nodded to a side tunnel and they started in that direction. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"What?" he demanded.

"Your mood."

"Nothing's wrong with my rusting mood," he said. "It's precisely the mood you're supposed to have when your partner forces you to stick your frontside into a buncha stuff that comes out of your backside."

"And last week?" she asked. "When we were investigating a *perfume shop*?"

"Rusting perfumers," Wayne said, his eyes narrowing. "Never can tell what they're hiding with those fancy smells. You can't trust a man what doesn't smell like a man should."

"Sweat and booze?"

"Sweat and *cheap* booze."

"Wayne, how can you complain about someone putting on airs? You put on a different personality every time you change hats."

"Does my smell change?"

"I suppose not."

"Argument won. There are literally no holes in it whatsoever. Conversation over."

They shared a look.

"I should get me some perfumes, eh?" Wayne said. "Someone might spot my disguises if I *always* smell like sweat and cheap booze."

"You're hopeless."

"What's hopeless," he said, "is my poor shoes."

"Could have worn boots like I suggested."

"Ain't got no boots," he said. "Wax stole them."

"Wax stole your boots. Really."

"Well, they're in his closet," Wayne said. "Instead of three pairs of his poshest shoes. Which somehow ended up in my closet, completely by happenstance." He glanced at her. "It was a fair trade. I liked those boots."

Marasi smiled. They'd been working together for almost six years now, since Wax's retirement following the discovery of the Bands of Mourning. Wayne was an official constable, not some barely-within-the-law deputized citizen. He even wore a uniform once in a while. And—

—and Marasi's boot slipped again. Rusting hell. If she fell, he would *never* stop laughing. But this did seem the best way. Construction on the citywide underground train tunnels was ongoing, and two days ago a demolitions man had filed a curious report. He didn't want to blast the next section, as seismic readings indicated they were near an unmapped cavern.

This area underneath the city of Elendel was peppered with ancient caves. And it was the same region where a local group of gang enforcers kept vanishing and reappearing. As if they had a hidden entrance into an unknown, unseen lair.

She consulted the map, marked with the construction notes—and older annotations indicating a nearby oddity that the sewer builders had found years ago, but which had never been properly investigated.

"I think MeLaan is going to break up with me," Wayne said softly. "That's why maybe I've been uncharacteristically downbeat in my general disposition as of late."

"What makes you think she's going to do that?"

"On account of her tellin' me, 'Wayne, I'm probably going to break up with you in a few weeks.'"

"Well, that's polite of her."

"I think she's got a new job from the big guy," Wayne said. "But it ain't right, how slow it's goin'. 'S not the proper way to break up with a fellow."

"And what *is* the proper way?"

"Throw something at his head," Wayne said. "Sell his stuff. Tell his mates he's a knob."

"You have had some interesting relationships."

"Nah, just mostly bad ones," he said. "I asked Jammi Walls what she thought I should do— You know her? She's at the tavern most nights."

"I know her," Marasi said. "She's a woman of … ill repute."

"What?" Wayne said. "Who's been saying that? Jammi has a *great* reputation. Of all the whores on the block, she gives the best—"

"I do not need to hear the next part. Thank you."

"Ill repute," he said, chuckling. "I'm gonna tell Jammi you said that, Marasi. She worked *hard* for her reputation. Gets to charge four times what anyone else does! Ill repute indeed."

"And what did she say?"

"She said MeLaan wanted me to try harder in the relationship," Wayne said. "But I think in this case Jammi was wrong. Because MeLaan don't play games. When she says things, she means them. So it's … you know…"

"I'm sorry, Wayne," Marasi said, tucking the map under her arm and resting her hand on his shoulder.

"I knew it couldn't last," he said. "Rustin' knew it, you know? She's like, what, a thousand years old?"

"Roughly two-thirds that," Marasi said.

"And I'm not quite forty," Wayne said. "More like sixteen if you take account of my spry youthful physique."

"And your sense of humor."

"Damn right," he said, then sighed. "Things have been … tough lately. With Wax gettin' all fancy and MeLaan being gone for months at a time. Feel like nobody wants me around. Maybe I belong in a sewer, you know?"

"You don't," she said. "You're the best partner I've ever had."

"Only partner."

"Only? Gorglen doesn't count?"

"Nope. He's not human. I gots papers what prove he's a giraffe in disguise." Then he smiled. "But … thanks for askin'. Thanks for carin'."

She nodded, then led the way onward. When she'd imagined her life as a top detective and lawwoman, she hadn't envisioned *this.* At least the smell was getting better—or she was getting used to it.

It was extremely gratifying to find, at the exact spot marked on the map, an old metal door set into the sewer wall. Wayne held up the lantern, and one didn't need a keen detective's eye to see the door had been used recently. Silvery scrapes on one side of the frame, the handle rubbed clean of the pervasive filth and cobwebs.

The people who had built the sewers had discovered it, and highlighted it as a site of potential historical significance. But the note had been lost due to bureaucratic nonsense.

"Nice," Wayne said, leaning in beside her. "Some first-rate detectivin', Marasi. How many old surveys did you have to read to find this?"

“Too many,” she said. “People would be surprised how much of my time is spent in the documents library.”

“They leave the research outta the stories.”

“You did this sort of thing back in the Roughs?”

“Well, the Roughs variety of it,” Wayne said. “Usually involved holdin’ some bloke’s face down in the trough until he remembered whose old prospectin’ claim he’d been filchin’, but it’s the same principle. With more swearin’.”

She handed him her rifle and investigated the door. He didn’t like her to make a big deal out of it, but he could hold guns these days without his hands shaking. She’d never seen him fire one, but he said he could if he needed to.

The door was shut tight and had no lock on this side. But it seemed the people she was hunting had found it closed too—there were a bunch of marks along one edge. There was enough room to slip something between door and frame.

“I need a knife to get through this,” she said.

“You can use my razor-sharp wit.”

“Alas, Wayne, you aren’t the type of tool I need at the moment.”

“Ha!” he said. “I like that one.”

He handed her a knife from his backpack where they kept supplies like rope, and extra metals in case they faced Metalborn. This kind of gang shouldn’t have an Allomancer—they were your basic “shake down shopkeepers for protection money” types. Yet she had reports that made her wary, and she was increasingly sure this group was funded by the Set.

Years later, and she was still hunting answers to questions that had plagued her from the very start of her career as a lawwoman. The group known as the Set, once run by Wax’s Uncle Edwarn, then revealed to involve his sister, Telsin, as well. A group that followed, or worshipped, or somehow furthered the machinations of a dark figure known as Trell. A god, she thought. From ancient times.

If she caught the right people, she might finally get the answers. But she perpetually fell short. The closest she’d gotten to answers had been six years ago, but then everyone they’d captured—including Wax’s uncle—had been killed in an explosion. Leaving her to chase at shadows again, and the rest of Elendel's elite fully committed to ignoring the threat. Without evidence, she and Wax had been unable to prove that the Set even existed beyond Edwarn's lackeys.

Using the knife, she managed to undo the bar holding the door closed from the other side. The bar swung free with a soft clang, and she eased the door open to reveal a rough-hewn tunnel leading downward. One of the many that dotted this region, dating back to the ancient days before the Catacendre. To the time of myths and heroes, ashfalls and tyrants.

Together she and Wayne slipped inside, leaving the door as they'd found it. They dimmed their lantern as a precaution, then started into the depths.

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2

“Cravat?” Steris said, reading from the list.

“Tied and pinned,” Wax said, pulling it tight.

“Shoes?”

“Polished.”

“First piece of evidence?”

Wax flipped a silvery medallion in the air, then caught it.

“Second piece of evidence?” Steris asked, making a mark on her list.

He pulled a small folded stack of papers from his pocket. “Right here.”

“Third piece of evidence?”

Wax checked another pocket, then paused, looking around the small office—his senator’s chamber in the House of Proceedings. Had he left them … “On the desk back home,” he said, smacking his head.

“I brought a spare,” Steris said, digging in her bag.

Wax grinned. “Of course you did.”

“Two, actually,” Steris said, handing over a sheet of paper, which he tucked away. Then she consulted her list again.

Little Maxillium stepped up beside his mother, looking very serious as he scanned his own list of scribbles. At five years old he knew his letters, but preferred to make up his own.

“Dog picture,” Max said, as if reading from his list.

“I might need one of those,” Wax said. “Quite useful.”

Max solemnly presented it, then said, “Cat picture.”

“Need one of those too.”

"I'm bad at cats," Max said, handing him another sheet. "So it looks like a squirrel."

Wax hugged his son, then put the sheets away reverently with the others. The boy's sister—Tindwyl, as Steris liked traditional names—babbled in the corner, where Kath, the governess, was watching her.

Finally, Steris handed him his pistols one at a time. Long-barreled and weighty, they had been designed by Ranette to look menacing—but they had two safeties and were unloaded. It had been a while since he'd needed to shoot anyone, but he continued to make good use of his reputation as the "Lawman Senator of the Roughs." City folk, particularly politicians, were intimidated by small arms. They preferred to kill people with more modern weapons, like poverty and despair.

"Is a kiss for my wife on that list?" Wax asked.

"Actually, no," she said, surprised.

"A rare oversight," he said, then gave her a lingering kiss. "You should be the one going out there today, Steris. You did more preparation than I."

"You're the house lord."

"I could appoint you as a representative to speak for us."

"Please, no," she said. "You know how I am with people."

"You're good with the *right* people."

"And are politicians ever right about anything?"

"I hope so," he said, straightening his suit coat and turning toward the door. "Since I am one."

He pushed out of his chambers and walked down to the Senate floor. Steris would watch from her seat in the observation balcony—by now, everyone knew how particular she was about getting the same one.

As Wax stepped into the vast chamber—which buzzed with activity as senators returned from the short recess—he didn't go to his seat. Over the last few days, senators had debated the current bill, and his was the last speech in line. He had secured this spot with many promises and much trading, as he hoped it would give his arguments the advantage, give him the best chance to avert a terrible decision.

He stood to one side of the speakers' platform and waited for everyone to sit, his thumb hooked into his gunbelt, looming. You learned to put on a good loom in the Roughs when interrogating prisoners—and he was still shocked by how many of those skills worked here.

Governor Varlance didn't look at him. Instead the man adjusted his cravat, then checked his face powder—ghostly pale skin was fashionable these days, for some arcane reason. Then he laid out his medals on the desk, one at a time.

Rusts, I miss Aradel, Wax thought. It had been novel to have a competent governor. Like … eating hotel food and finding it wasn't awful, or spending time with Wayne and then discovering you still had a pocket watch.

However, the governor's job was the type that chewed up the good people but let the bad ones float blissfully along. Aradel had stepped down two years back. And it *had* made sense to choose a military man as the next governor, considering the tensions with the Southern Continent. Many people among the newly discovered countries there—with their airships and strange masks—were upset about how things had gone down six years ago. Specifically, that the Elendel Basin had kept the Bands of Mourning.

Right now, Elendel faced two primary problems. The first was the people on the Southern Continent, the foremost nation of which was known as the Malwish. They made constant noise about how small and weak the Basin was. Aggressive, militaristic posturing. Varlance had been a hedge against that, though Wax *did* question where he had earned all those medals. So far as Wax knew, the newly formed army hadn't seen any actual engagements.

The second problem was far closer to home. It was the parts of the Basin that were outside the capital, the people in what were collectively known as the Outer Cities. For years, maybe decades, tensions had been building between the city of Elendel and everyone else.

It was bad enough to be facing threats from another continent. But to Wax, that was a more distant danger. The immediate one, the one that gave him the most stress, was the prospect of a civil war among his own people. He and Steris had been working for years to prevent that.

Varlance finally nodded to his vice governor, a Terriswoman. She had curly dark hair and a traditional robe; Wax thought he'd known her in the

Village, but it could have been her sister, and he'd never come up with a good way to ask. Regardless, it looked respectable to have a Terris person on staff. Most governors appointed one to a high position in their cabinet—almost as if the Terris were another medal to display.

Adawathwyn stood up and announced to the room, "The governor recognizes the senator from House Ladrian."

Though he'd been waiting for this, Wax took his time sauntering up onto the podium, which was lit from above by a massive electric spotlight. He made a slow rotation, inspecting the circular chamber. One side held the elected officials: senators who were voted into office to represent a guild, profession, or historical group. The other held the lords: senators who held their positions by benefit of birth.

"This bill," Wax declared to the room, loud and firm, his voice echoing, "is a fantastically *stupid* idea."

Once, earlier in his political career, talking so bluntly had earned him ire. Now he caught multiple members of the Senate smiling. They expected this from him—even appreciated it. They knew how many problems there were in the Basin and were glad someone among them was willing to call them out.

"Tensions with the Malwish are at an all-time high," Wax said. "This is a time for the Basin to unite, not a time to drive wedges between our cities!"

"This is *about* uniting!" another voice called. The dockworkers' senator, Melstrom. He was mostly a puppet for Hasting and Erikell, nobles who had consistently been a painful spike in Wax's side. "We need a single leader for the whole Basin. Officially!"

"Agreed," Wax said. "But *how* is elevating the Elendel governor— a position no one outside the city can vote on—going to unite people?"

"It will give them someone to look toward. A strong, capable leader."

And that, Wax thought, glancing at Varlance, *is a capable leader? We're lucky he pays attention in these meetings rather than going over his publicity schedule.* Varlance had, so far in the first two years of his tenure, rededicated seventeen parks in the city. He liked the flowers.

Wax kept to the plan, getting out his medallion and flipping it into the air. “Six years ago,” he said, “I had a little adventure. You all know about it. Finding a wrecked Malwish airship, and thwarting a plot by the Outer Cities to use its secrets against Elendel. I stopped that. I brought the Bands of Mourning back to be stored safely.”

“And almost started a war,” someone muttered in the reaches of the room.

“You’d prefer I let the plot go forward?” Wax called back. When no response came, he flipped the medallion up and caught it again. It was one of the weight-affecting medallions the Malwish used to make their ships light enough to fly. “I dare anyone in this room to question my loyalty to Elendel. We can have a nice little duel. I’ll even let you shoot first.”

Silence. He’d earned that. A lot of the people in this room didn’t like him, but they *did* respect him. And they knew he wasn’t an agent for the Outer Cities.

He flipped the medallion and then Pushed it higher, all the way up toward the ceiling high above. It came streaking down again, glimmering in the light. As he snatched it, he glanced at Admiral Jonnes, current ambassador from the Malwish nation. She sat in a special place on the Senate floor, where visiting mayors from Outer Cities were given seats. None had come to this proceeding. A visible sign of their anger.

This bill, if approved, would elevate the Elendel governor above all Outer Cities mayors—allowing him or her to intervene in local disputes. To the point of *removing* a mayor and calling a special election, approving candidates. While Wax agreed that a central ruler would be an important step for uniting the Basin, this bill was an outright insult to all of their people living outside the capital.

“I know our position,” Wax said, turning the medallion over in his fingers, “better than anyone. You want to make a show of force to the Malwish. Prove that we can make our own cities bend to our rules. So you introduce this bill.

“But this underlines *why* everyone outside Elendel is so frustrated with us! The revolutionaries in the other cities wouldn’t have gotten so far without the support of their people. If the average person living outside

Elendel weren't so *damned* angry about our trade policies and general arrogance, we wouldn't be in this position.

"This bill isn't going to placate them! It's not a 'show of force.' It's *specifically* designed to outrage the people. If we pass this law, we're *demanding* civil war."

He let that sink in. The others were so determined to appear strong to external enemies. But if left unchecked, they'd strong-arm themselves right into war over *internal* disputes. The Malwish problems were real, but not as immediate. Civil war, though, would be devastating.

The worst part was, someone was pushing for it in secret. Wax was certain the Set was again interfering in Elendel politics. His … sister was involved. He wasn't certain why they wanted a civil war, but they'd been trying for years now. And if he let this proceed, playing into the hands of their real enemies, both the elite around him now and the revolutionaries in the cities outside would have cause to mourn.

Wax pulled out the stack of papers in his left pocket. He tucked the dog and cat pictures at the back, then held the rest up to the room. "I have sixty letters from politicians in the Outer Cities here. They represent a large faction who *don't* want conflict. These are *reasonable* people. They are willing—eager—to work with Elendel. But they are also frightened about what their people will do if we continue to impose tyrannical, imperial policies on them.

"I propose that we vote down this bill and work on something better. Something that *actually* promotes peace and unity. A national assembly, with representation for each Outer City—and an elected supreme official elevated by *that* body."

He'd expected boos, and he got a few. But most of the chamber fell silent, watching him hold those letters aloft. They were afraid of letting power leave the capital. Afraid that Outer Cities politics would change their culture. They were cowards.

Maybe he was too, because the idea of the Set pulling strings terrified him. Who among those looking at him now were secretly their agents? Rusts, he didn't even understand their motives. They wanted war—as a way to gain power, certainly. But there was more.

They followed orders from something known as Trell.

Wax turned around slowly, still holding the letters, and felt a little spike of alarm as he turned his back on Melstrom. *He's going to shoot,* Wax thought.

"With all due respect, Lord Ladrian," Melstrom said. "You are a new parent, and obviously don't understand how to raise a child. You don't give in to their demands; you hold firm, knowing that your decisions are best for them. They will eventually see reason. As a father is to a son, Elendel is to the Outer Cities."

Right in the back, Wax thought, turning around.

He didn't respond immediately. You wanted to aim return fire carefully. He'd made these arguments before—mostly in private—to many of the senators in this room. He was making headway, but he needed more time. With these letters, he could return to each senator, the ones on the fence, and share the words. The ideas. Persuade.

His gut said that if the vote happened today, the bill would pass. So, he hadn't come here to repeat his arguments. He'd come with a bullet loaded in the chamber, ready to fire.

He folded up the letters and tucked them snugly into his pocket. Then he took the smaller stack—two sheets—from his other pocket. The ones that Steris had brought spares of in case he forgot. She'd probably made copies of the other stack too. And seven other things she knew he wouldn't need—but it made her feel better to have them in her bag just in case. Rusts, that woman was delightful.

Wax held up the sheets and made a show of getting just the right light to read. "'Dear Melstrom,'" he read out loud, "'we are pleased by your willingness to see reason and continue to enforce Elendel trade superiority in the Basin. This is a wise choice. We will deliver half a percent of our shipping revenues for the next three years in exchange for your personal support of this bill. From Houses Hasting and Erikell.'"

The room erupted into chaos. Wax settled in, hooking his finger into his gunbelt, waiting for the cries of outrage to run their course. He met Melstrom's eyes as the man sank back into his seat. The rusting idiot had just learned an important lesson: Don’t leave a paper trail detailing your corruption when your political opponent is a trained detective. Idiot.

As the shouts finally died down, Wax spoke again, louder this time. “I *demand* we hold impropriety hearings to investigate Senator Melstrom’s apparent sale of his vote in *blatant* violation of anti-corruption laws.”

“And by so doing,” the governor said, “delay the Elendel Supremacy Bill vote?”

“How could we vote on it,” Wax said, “if we aren’t sure the votes are being cast in good faith?”

More outrage. Wax weathered it as the governor consulted with his vice governor. She was a smart one. Anything Varlance accomplished that didn’t involve cutting a ribbon or kissing a baby was probably her doing.

As the chamber calmed, the governor looked to Wax. “I trust you have proof of this letter’s authenticity, Ladrian.”

“I have affidavits from three separate handwriting experts to prove it’s not a forgery,” Wax said. “And you’ll find my wife’s detailed account of the letter’s acquisition exhaustive and unimpugnable.”

“Then I suggest impropriety hearings follow,” the governor said. “*After* the vote on the Supremacy Bill.”

“But—” Wax said.

“We will,” the governor interrupted, “require Melstrom, Hasting, and Erikell to sit out the vote. *Assuring* that the vote is not corrupted.”

Damn.

Damn, damn, *damn.*

Before he could counter that, the vice governor slammed her gavel. “Votes in favor of continuing?”

Most of the hands on the Senate floor went up. For a simple vote like this, a more straw poll method would do—unless the vote turned out to be very close. It wasn’t.

The real vote, on the bill, would proceed.

“Have you any more explosions to detonate, Ladrian?” the governor said. “Or can we get on with this?”

“No more explosions, Your Honor,” Wax said with a sigh. “They were my old partner’s specialty anyway. Instead, I have a final plea to the chamber.” His maneuver had failed. Now he had one last card to play. A request not from Waxillium Ladrian.

But one from Dawnshot, the lawman.

“You all know me,” he said, turning around in a circle, meeting their eyes. “I’m a simple man from the Roughs. I don’t do politics right, but I *do* understand angry people and the hard lives of working women and men.

“If we’re going to take the role of parent, we should treat our children well. Give them a chance to speak for themselves. If we keep pretending they’re toddlers, they’re merely going to start ignoring us—at best. You want to send a message? Send the message that we care and are willing to listen.”

He took his seat finally, next to Yancey Yaceczko, a good-natured and patient fellow—and one of the senators who’d actually listened to Wax.

“Good show, Wax,” the man whispered, leaning in. “Good show indeed. It’s always a pleasure.”

Yancey would vote with him. In fact, a decent number of the nobles empathized with Wax. While a lot of the things Marasi had been saying recently made Wax uncomfortable about his hereditary position, in this instance the lords might turn out to be *slightly* less corrupt than their counterparts. The elected senators had to retain their seats, and voting for this bill was likely to improve the lives of their constituents.

That was the problem. According to the latest census, more people now lived *outside* the city than *inside* it. Most of the laws dated back to when there had been one city and a bunch of farming villages. Now that those villages had grown up into cities, their people wanted a stronger voice in Basin politics.

Elendel was no longer a scrappy settlement rebuilding after an apocalypse. They were a nation; even the Roughs were changing, growing, being modernized. Rusts, with all the land in the Roughs, he could imagine a time when more people lived there than in the Basin proper.

They needed to enfranchise those people, not ignore them. He still had hope. He and Steris and their allies had worked for *months* to erode support for the bill. Innumerable dinners, parties, and even—as he’d started doing for some of the city’s elite—some training on the shooting range.

All in the name of changing the world. One vote at a time.

The governor called for the vote, and Lady Mi'chelle Yomen cast the first one—against the bill. As it proceeded, Wax sat, as anxious as he'd ever been before a confrontation with a bandit group. Rusts … this was somehow *worse*. Each vote was the crack of a bullet. *Lady Faula and Senator Vindel. How will they break? And Maraya? Was she persuaded, or …*

Two of them voted for the bill, along with multiple others that he'd been uncertain about. Wax felt a sinking feeling, worse than being shot, as the vote proceeded—and eventually landed at 122 for, 118 against.

The bill passed. His stomach fell further. If Wax was going to stop a civil war, he'd need to find another way.

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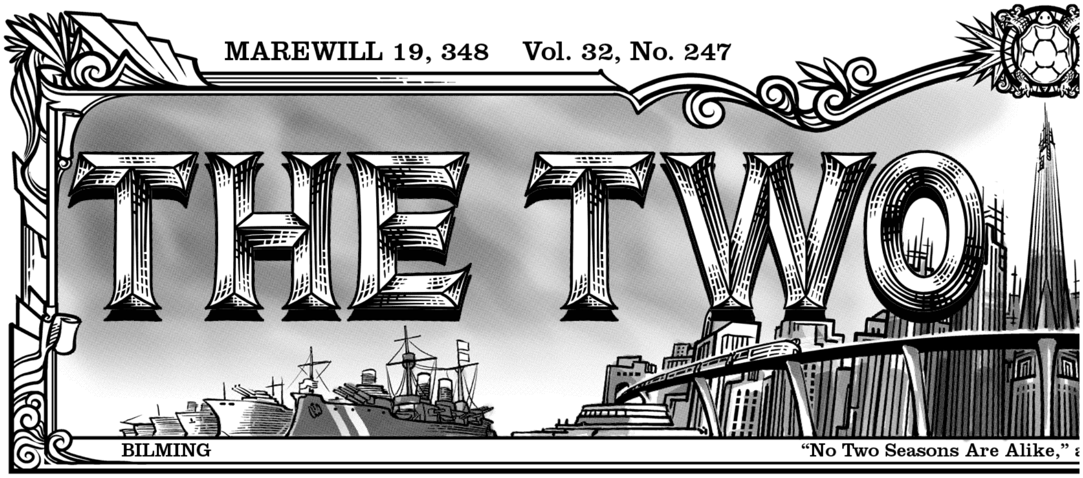
MAREWILL 19, 348 Vol. 32, No. 247



BILMING

“No Two Seasons Are Alike,” a

Handerwym Presents
NICKI SAVAGE
and
The COMPASS of Spirits

In my last letter, the Haunted Man, my two Faceless Immortal companions, and I saw the Coinshot Vila Mecant grab the Compass of Spirits and throw herself off a stone outcropping into the mists. The aluminum key that activated it, however, was still with me. Knowing Vila would be back, I entrusted the key to the Haunted Man, who used his hellguns to launch himself to another outcropping, leaving me to convince my faceless friends I had a plan… Which, of course, I *did*.

Chapter 8: “Flight of the Ornisaur”

KeSun rolled her eyes. “Exactly *how* do you expect to follow Vila and lure her out?”

“The aluminum bones we lifted from the ornisaur quarry,” I said, patting Tabaar’s giant backpack.

He groaned deep within his corpulent body. “Oh no…”

“You are incredible at imitation,” I said encouragingly. “Remember when you were Human the koloss in *A Hero for All Ages*? You were masterful! You can do this!”

“He can’t,” said KeSun, folding her arms. “Not without me. I’m the one with experience impersonating birds.”

Turning to Tabaar, she said, “If you are willing to yield some control to me, then we can carry Miss Sauvage across this abyss.”

“But the rest of my collection…” he said, the bag of bones shifting on his back.

“We’ll return for them,” said KeSun, with a compassion in her voice she reserved only for Tabaar. “I promise.”

She raised an eyebrow at me. “Will you kindly look away?” she asked. “We’d rather you not see us when we…”

“*…merge*,” said Tabaar.

What followed was one of the strangest things I’ve ever encountered, stranger even than the Beast of Belmon Couture or that time when I was Allomancer Jak’s assistant.

(Continued below the fold!)

The Two Seasons would like to retract our dear editor Kyndlip Ternavyl’s comments of two weeks ago, prior to her disappearance, when she compared our beloved mayor to “an irascible boar; no smarter, less attractive, and unable to keep from rolling around in every mire he comes across.”

ELENDEL SUPF
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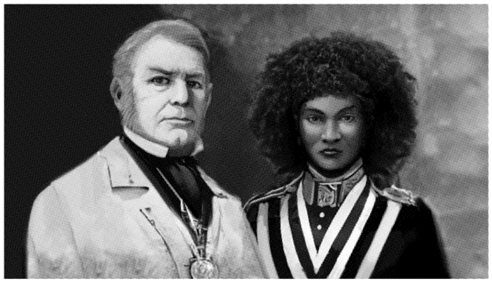
UNITY OR DIVISION? PROGRI



The Governor and Vice Governor

In a matter of days, Elendel’s Senate will vote on what Bilming’s top political mind, Professor Garven Munz, has called “the most monumental change to our government structure since the Words of Founding.”

Days of speeches, debates, and posturing are planned leading up to the vote, and the eyes of the Outer Cities are focused on the so-called Lawman Senator of the Roughs, whose recent visits north of the Basin have solidified his stance with which many Outer City dwellers concur: Representation Before Supremacy.

Governor Varlance and his cronies vehemently oppose this tack, their views summed up in Vice Governor Adawathwyn’s bold opening remarks that “We’ll need a strong, experienced leader when war comes to us from our masked Southern friends.” Admiral Jonnes of the Malwish Nation looked visibly shaken and did not return after the Senate’s following recess.

When Varlance was asked if he too thought the Basin might be headed toward war with the Malwish, he merely patted his chest where he’d conspicuously hung his military medals.

(Continued on back.)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Once again I must object to your continued allowance of ads from Soonie Industries, manufacturers of the “Soonie Pup,” who have also ignored

GUEST EDITORIAL

by Gemmes Millis, Interim Editor

ENFORCE NOSEBALL BAN!

We see them in every unsown field and vacant lot. Vagrants and layabouts, some of them

The Man Who Electrifed Time!
The new novel by Bilming-born working man Schrib Welfor. Available now in all fine bookshops!

HELP WANTED~Bendalloy

Flight of the Ornisaur

Though I desperately wanted to peek, my regard for my longtime companions

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THE TWO SEASONS

MAREWILL 19, 348

Vol. 32, No. 247

Kyndlip Ternavyl, Editor and Proprietor

BILMING

“No Two Seasons Are Alike,” an Originators Proverb

5 clips

Handerwym Presents

NICKI SAVAGE

and

The COMPASS of Spirits

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“The aluminum bones we lifted from the ornisaur quarry,” I said, patting Tabaar’s giant backpack.

He groaned deep within his corpulent body. “Oh no…”

“You are incredible at imitation,” I said encouragingly. “Remember when you were Human the koloss in *A Hero for All Ages?* You were masterful! You can do this!”

“He can’t,” said KeSun, folding her arms. “Not without me. I’m the one with experience impersonating birds.”

Turning to Tabaar, she said, “If you are willing to yield some control to me, then we can carry Miss Sauvage across this abyss.”

“But the rest of my collection…” he said, the bag of bones shifting on his back.

“We’ll return for them,” said KeSun, with a compassion in her voice she reserved only for Tabaar. “I promise.”

She raised an eyebrow at me. “Will you kindly look away?” she asked. “We’d rather you not see us when we…”

“*…merge,*” said Tabaar.

What followed was one of the strangest things I’ve ever encountered, stranger even than the Beast of Belmon Couture or that time when I was Allomancer Jak’s assistant.

(Continued below the fold!)

The Two Seasons would like to retract our dear editor Kyndlip Ternavyl’s comments of two weeks ago, prior to her disappearance, when she compared our beloved mayor to “an irascible boar; no smarter, less attractive, and unable to keep from rolling around in every mire he comes across.”

ELENDEL SUPREMACY BILL THREATENS BASIN UNITY

UNITY OR DIVISION? PROGRESS OR PERNICIOUSNESS?

In a matter of days, Elendel's Senate will vote on what Bilming's top political mind, Professor Garven Munz, has called "the most monumental change to our government structure since the Words of Founding."

Days of speeches, debates, and posturing are planned leading up to the vote, and the eyes of the Outer Cities are focused on the so-called Lawman Senator of the Roughs, whose recent visits north of the Basin have solidified his stance with which many Outer City dwellers concur: Representation Before Supremacy.

Governor Varlance and his cronies vehemently oppose this tack, their views summed up in Vice Governor Adawathwyn's bold opening remarks that "We'll need a strong, experienced leader when war comes to us from our masked Southern friends." Admiral Jonnes of the Malwish Nation looked visibly shaken and did not return after the Senate's following recess.

When Varlance was asked if he too thought the Basin might be headed toward war with the Malwish, he merely patted his chest where he'd conspicuously hung his military medals.

(Continued on back.)

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Marasi studied the footprints in the dust. They appeared to be a few weeks old, as they'd gathered dust themselves. She walked over to Wayne, who was inspecting the path farther down into the depths: an arduous-looking tunnel with a steep decline. He glanced at her.

"If they're slippin' in and out of the city fast," he said, "they musta found a different way out of here. They aren't makin' this hike regularly."

"Agreed," she said. "We should be stealthy anyway, in case they posted lookouts."

In response, he turned his lantern down and whispered, "You want to continue without backup?"

"For now. We want to scout and see what we find. I don't want to mobilize everyone for a dead end."

Together, the two of them struck forward through the tunnel. The difficulty of the path and its apparent lack of traffic encouraged her. If the enemy was down here but used a different route, then taking this path meant she and Wayne were less likely to be discovered.

They took the decline carefully. Rusts … thank goodness she had trousers on. If she was going to slip and break her skull, she could at least do it with dignity. Or as much dignity as a woman could manage after hiking through sewage for an hour.

She distracted herself by imagining that these caverns must be as old as the Ascendant Warrior—or even older. These tunnels had slumbered through the destruction of the world, through the Catacendre, through the rise and fall of the Final Empire. Had the stones they walked past broken loose from the ceiling during the days of the Ashmounts?

She couldn’t help wondering if they would stumble across the mythical Survivor’s Cradle—the Pits of Hathsin—though she knew that was foolish. Wax said he had been to them, and had found no magical metals of lore.

They eventually hit a particularly deep shaft down; it was essentially vertical, though with a lot of obstructions and clefts in the stone to climb on. Wayne brightened their lantern again, looking doubtful.

“We sure they came this way?” he asked in a whisper.

“Who else would have made the footprints?”

“Footprints?”

“In the dust? And near the opening, they were crusted over with sewage from boots? Seriously, Wayne, you can be remarkably oblivious for a detective.”

“You and Wax are detectives,” he said. “Not me.”

“What are you then?”

“Bullet stopper,” he said. “Skull knocker. Guy who occasionally gets exploded.”

“We’ll be doing nothing like that today,” Marasi whispered. “We will peek in, see if I’m right, then get out for clearance and support.”

“Guess we’ll be comin’ back up this way then,” he said with a sigh, then dug the climbing rope out of his canvas backpack. He found a sturdy rock formation to tie it around, then tossed the other side down into the darkness.

He started down first, then Marasi followed, rifle slung across her back. The descent proved easier than she’d feared, as the rope had knots in it. Still, her arms were soon burning.

“So,” Wayne said softly, dangling below, keeping pace with her instead of going on ahead, “wanna hear my list of ways how women break the laws of physics?”

“Depends,” Marasi said. “How misogynistic is it? Can you give me a number on some kind of scale?”

“Uh … thirteen?”

“Out of what?”

“Seventeen?”

“What kind of insane scale is that?” she whispered, halting atop a boulder and glancing down at him. “Why in the world would you pick seventeen? Why not, at least, sixteen?”

“I don’t know! You’re the one what asked me for a scale. Look, this is good. Women. Break the laws of physics. I’ve been thinkin’ on this forever. Couple days at least. You’ll like it.”

“I’m sure.”

“Way one,” he said, sliding to the next outcropping. “When they take off clothes, they get *hotter.* Strange, eh? Normal folks, they get colder when they take off—”

“Normal folks?” she repeated, following him. “By normal, you mean *men*?”

“Uh … I guess.”

“So half the world is not normal? *Women* are not normal?”

“It sounds a little silly when you say it like that.”

“You think?”

“Look, I just wanted to point out something interesting. Useful observationalizing ’bout the nature of the cosmere and the relationship between the genders.”

“I think you thought of something that amused you, and wanted an excuse to say it.” She landed on the little platform next to him, and below she could finally see the bottom. They were roughly halfway.

He met her eyes. “So … uh … fourteen then?” he said. “Outta seventeen.”

“And rising. It’s not even true, Wayne. Plenty of men get hotter when they take off clothing. Depends on the man.”

He grinned. “What about Allik?”

“With Allik, it’s more the mask.”

“He raises the rusting thing so often, makes you wonder why he wears it in the first place.”

“Moving the mask is like … emphasis to the Malwish. It’s not *wrong* to let people see under the mask, though they pretend it’s taboo—and maybe it was once upon a time. Now they like the way they can use it to express themselves.”

He swung over the side and continued down. She gave him a little space, then followed.

"So…" he said. "Want to hear number two?"

"Actually … I kind of do."

"Ha! I thought so. Wax would have said no."

"Wax had years to get accustomed to the depths of your depravity, Wayne. To me, it's still *remarkable* how you manage to dig yourself deeper each and every time."

"Fair enough. Number two: Ask a woman how much she weighs. Then lift her. She'll have increased in weight. Feruchemists, every one."

"Wayne, that joke is so tired, it slept through breakfast."

"What. Really?"

"Absolutely. My father was making stupid cracks about women lying about their weight when I was a child."

"Damn. Old blustering Harms made that joke?" He looked up at her with wide eyes. "Oh, *hell,* Marasi. Am I getting old? Was that an *old man joke*?"

"I have no comment."

"Damn conners and their damn tight lips." He reached the bottom and dropped off the rope softly, with a rustle of cloth and boots on stone, then held the rope steady for her.

She climbed the rest of the way to join him. "So, what's number three on the list?"

"I don't got one yet."

"It's a list of two items, one of which was dumb?"

"*Two* of which was dumb," he said sullenly. "One was apparently also geriatric. Same jokes as Lord Harms. I'm losing my edge, I am." He met her eyes, then grinned. "Does this mean I get to be the grumpy old one in the partnership? You can be the young spunky one what swears all the time and makes bad life decisions."

She grinned. "Do I get a lucky hat?"

"Only if you treat it well," he said, his hand over his heart, "and take it off before somethin' unlucky happens, as to not break its lucky streak."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said, eyeing the tunnel that extended onward from the bottom of the shaft. "But let's cut the chatter—as much as I love learning whatever has metastasized in your brain lately, we can't afford to be overheard."

He dimmed the lantern again and they continued along the tunnel. People at the constabulary offices gave her sympathetic looks on occasion for putting up with Wayne—but the truth was, he could be a really good constable when he wanted to. And he usually *did* want to.

Case in point, at her request he kept his mouth closed and concentrated on the job. Wayne could lack decorum, and could be painfully un-self-aware at times, but he was a good partner. Even excellent. So long as you got past his bubble—not his Allomantic one, but his personal one. Wayne was a fort of a man, with outer walls and defenses. If you were one of the lucky few he let in, you had a friend for life. One who'd stand with you against *literal* gods.

We're going to find you, Trell, Marasi thought, creeping forward. She'd first heard that name uttered by a dying man, years ago—and she was increasingly certain Trell was a god of vast power like Harmony. *You can't hide forever. Not if you want to keep influencing the world.*

Wayne grabbed her arm, stopping her without a word. Then he pointed at a tiny light shining far along the tunnel ahead. They crept the final distance, then peeked around the corner and were rewarded by the exact sight she'd been hoping for: a pair of men in vests and hats only a few feet away, playing cards on an overturned box. A small lamp flickered on their improvised table.

Marasi nodded backward. She and Wayne crept away again, far enough to not be heard whispering. She looked to him in the darkness, wondering at his advice. Should they poke forward further, or was this enough of a confirmation to go get backup?

"Tragic," Wayne whispered.

"What?"

"Poor sod's got a great hand," Wayne whispered. "One in a million. And he's playin' against his broke buddy on guard duty? Rusting waste of a full-on Survivor's suite…"

Marasi rolled her eyes, then pointed to a small darkened side tunnel splitting off the main one. “Let’s see where this goes.”

Behind them, a cursed exclamation echoed in the tunnels; sounded like the fellow with the good hand had just revealed it. This smaller tunnel wound around to the right of the guard post, and they soon saw why it wasn’t guarded; it hit a kind of dead end. Though some light did spill through a two-foot-wide hole in the rocks there.

They sidled up to it, then peeked through into a midsized cavern—roughly as big as a dock warehouse—full of men and women boxing goods or lounging on improvised furniture. The hole appeared to be part of the natural rock formations; dripping water from the ceiling had covered the wall with odd protrusions and knobs, covering up what might once have been a larger opening. Marasi and Wayne were maybe fifteen feet up.

She let out a long breath and surveyed the operation. It *was* here. Months of work. Months of promising Reddi her leads were good. Months of connecting theft records, witness accounts, and money trails. And here it was. A large-scale smuggling base set up directly underneath the city, funded by—best she could guess—a mix of Outer Cities interests and the Set.

It was actually here. By Harmony’s True Name … she’d *done* it.

Wayne looked to her with a wide smile on his face, then nudged her in the shoulder. “Nice,” he whispered. “*Real* nice.”

“Thanks,” she whispered.

“When you tell the constable-general about this,” he said, “leave out the part where I whined because of the sewage.”

“And the bad jokes?”

“Nah. Leave those in. You gotta give people what they expect, or they won’t believe your lies when you tell them.”

Marasi took in the sight. Thirty-seven people, counting the two guards, all armed. Even the menial workers wore holsters. Judging by the leads she’d been tracing, those boxes would be full of military supplies—with a frightening number of explosive components. The gang had tried to cover their tracks by making some more mundane thefts as well, but she was confident she knew what was really happening here.

Elendel had been squeezing the Outer Cities by refusing to let certain items—including weapons—be shipped out of Elendel, which was a central hub for all the train lines. This group was acting like an ordinary gang with their shakedowns and the like, but she was almost a hundred percent certain their purpose was to funnel weapons toward Bilming, current capital of Outer Cities interests.

She didn't like the Outer Cities being forced to work this way—but these gang members had killed innocent people on the streets. Plus, they were likely collaborating with some kind of evil god bent on the subjugation or destruction of the world.

"Right, then," Wayne whispered, pointing. "See that fellow near the back in the nice outfit? He's a Set member for certain. Maybe the new Cycle."

Marasi nodded. Cycle was the lowest level of real officer in the Set. They were local bosses that operated gangs of hired muscle. Miles Hundredlives had been a Cycle, reporting to the Suit above him. This man was dressed in an upscale way—visibly more decorated than the others in the cavern. He was also lean, muscular, and tall. As a Cycle, he might be Metalborn. So they'd best not underestimate him in a fight.

"You plug that fellow in the head with a nice rifle shot," Wayne said, "and I bet the entire group will fold to us."

"That isn't how things work in the real world, Wayne," Marasi whispered.

"Sure it is," Wayne said. "If that's the guy payin' them, those other sods got no reason to keep fightin'."

"Even if you were right—and I sincerely doubt you are—that's not how we're going to do this. Confirmation, coordination, backup, and proper authorization. Remember?"

"I try not to," he grumbled. "Can't we do this one my way? I got nothin' against some blokes just doin' their jobs, but I'd hate to hike through all that muck again, then return here and find this lot gone. Let's bring 'em in now."

"No," she said. "Your way involves too much chaos."

"That's a bad thing because…"

“Well, there’s the whole *officers of the law* thing.”

“Right, right,” he said, then checked in his coat to reveal a shiny badge. It wasn’t something they used in the city, preferring their paper credentials.

“Is that … Wax’s old badge from the Roughs?” she asked.

“He traded it to me.”

“For?”

“Half a meat-’n’-ale bun.” Wayne grinned. “He’ll find it eventually. They get *real* hard to ignore.”

She shook her head, waving him back down the tunnel. They had to keep their lantern darkened though—and that made it difficult to see. So despite being careful, as they returned to the main tunnel they surprised a guard who had stepped that direction to relieve himself.

He glanced at them in the darkness, then shouted. Wayne had him down and knocked out half a second later, but cries of alarm sounded from the direction of the main cavern.

Still standing atop the body, Wayne looked to her and grinned again. “My way it is!”

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There was no way for Marasi and Wayne to escape using the difficult route they'd taken to get here—not with the entire gang on their tails. Beyond that, she wanted to capture that Cycle, who would certainly vanish after this.

Unfortunately all of this meant Wayne was right. So much for protocol.

It was time to do this his way.

They burst into the main tunnel, where the other guard had his gun pointed toward them. Wayne tossed up a speed bubble, giving him and Marasi time to step aside and flank the guard.

Once the speed bubble dropped, the gangster fired into now-open space. Wayne was on him a moment later, laying into him with dueling canes. Marasi left him to it, instead picking her spot. Beyond the card table was a wide tunnel presumably leading into the main warehouse cavern. She went to one knee and raised her rifle, sighting, calming herself, waiting …

She fired the moment someone appeared from that direction. Only her training on the range prevented her from immediately trying to cycle the bolt on her gun. This was a new semiautomatic Bastion rifle, and so she kept it shouldered and downed the next person who stumbled over the falling body. Those behind called a warning, and no one dared come barreling in after that.

Wayne wiped his brow, leaving an unconscious gangster on the floor. "You got the magic boxes?"

“They’re not magic, Wayne,” Marasi said. “Malwish technology is just different but—”

“Magic boxes from your boyfriend. How many?”

“I have three Allomantic grenades,” she said. “All of the new design. And two flash-bangs. Wax charged one of the grenades for me before we left.”

“Nifty,” Wayne said. “Got a plan?”

“You hold the tunnel. I’ll go back to that overlook and toss some Allomantic grenades to catch groups of enemies, then cover you as you move in. Once you’re out of the line of fire, I’ll follow.”

“Good as done!” Wayne said, and they split, him heading toward the two people she’d dropped. There he picked up one of their handguns and fired it a bunch of times into the main chamber—not to hit, but to make those beyond take cover. His hand wobbled a little, and he tossed the weapon aside as soon as it was empty, but it was excellent progress. Not that he needed to be *more* deadly, she supposed.

She left him, rounding to the overlook, which made a decent sniper spot. She picked out several groups of gangsters behind nearby boxes, watching as Wayne fired a second gun.

Marasi carefully took a small metal box from the pouch on her belt. All her life she had suffered disappointment and even dismissal because of her useless Allomantic talent. She could slow time around herself, which was … well, not much use. It essentially froze her to the perspective of everyone around her—removing her from a fight, giving the advantage to her enemies.

She’d found occasional uses for it, but mostly she’d internalized the presumed truth that her abilities were weak.

Then she’d met Allik.

His people revered all Metalborn, Allomancers and Feruchemists alike. Though he’d been in awe of Wax and his flashy powers, Allik had been equally impressed with *her* abilities. She had one of the most useful Allomantic skills, he claimed. That had been difficult to accept, but the upshot was that if you had access to a little specialized technology, you could turn the world on its head.

Perhaps an inch and a half across, the Allomantic grenade hummed as she burned cadmium—and it absorbed her energy. She wasn't swallowed by a bubble of slowness; with these new designs, all the power went into the box. She'd charged it earlier, but that had been hours ago and she wanted to top it off.

Then, judging the distance carefully, she tossed it toward a group of enemies who had gathered behind some boxes for cover. Her months of practice paid off; she managed to land the device right in the center of the gangsters, who—focused on Wayne—barely noticed it rolling among them.

The grenade used ettmetal, which was tightly regulated by the Malwish, so she didn't blame the gangsters for not knowing what to do; even among the Malwish these were rare. If the men had heard of the devices—and they might have, since the Set was known to employ them—they had likely never seen one.

A second later, a bubble of slowed time popped up around the device, trapping about ten of the men and women. She quickly topped off, then threw, the second of her three grenades—this one aimed at a group of enemies farther along. Her aim was true, and she ensnared another eight.

Calls of "Metalborn!" echoed through the cavern as the rest of the gangsters noticed that over half their number were frozen. Those would move in turgid slow motion as they tried to escape the bubble—but the ten-minute charge on the grenade would run out before they managed it.

She unslung her rifle and laid down covering fire—even picking off two of those remaining—as Wayne slipped into the main chamber. He moved in a blur of speed for a moment, then popped out of his speed bubble and leaped over a cleft in the rock. It took a bit between uses for him to recover his talents and put up another bubble, but she swore that time was shrinking.

He avoided the trapped people; she and he would deal with them later. For now he took advantage of the confusion to get in close to a couple of enemies. They noticed him, but he became a blur again—then came in from above, dueling canes held high.

Their shouts of pain distracted the others, which let Marasi pick off two more. Then she dashed back around to the main tunnel. Here she glanced into the warehouse cavern, then ran in a low crouch—careful to avoid the faintly shimmering perimeter bubbles of the grenades. She knew all too well how it felt to be surrounded by that molasses air while everything around you moved like lightning.

Marasi found her own cover near some packing equipment, and as the remaining gangsters reoriented, gunfire began pounding the stone and metal around her. As a girl, she'd read all about Wax's exploits in the Roughs—and the more she practiced her trade, the more inaccuracies she spotted. Sure, the stories mentioned gunfire. But they usually left out how *loud* it was when bullets struck. With them pelting the equipment around her, it sounded like she'd given little Max a set of drumsticks and let him loose in a kitchenware shop.

A second later the sounds slowed—like a phonograph playing at a fraction of normal power. The air shimmered near her, and Wayne slumped up against the equipment, a grin on his face—and a bloody wound on his shoulder.

"Sloppy," she said, nodding to the wound.

"Hey now," he said. "Any fellow can accidentally get shot now and then. 'Specially if he's runnin' around with a pair of sticks in a room with lotsa guns."

"How much bendalloy do you have left?"

"Plenty."

"You sure?"

"Yup."

"Wayne, I'm proud of you," she said. "You're actually saving it, being frugal like I asked."

He shrugged like it was nothing, but she *was* legitimately proud of him. He received an allotment from the department, and during the early days of their partnership he'd always run out on missions. She'd been planning to talk to Captain Reddi about increasing the allotment, until she'd discovered that Wayne used his bendalloy for all *kinds* of non-combat, non-detective work. Playing pranks, changing costumes to delight children, the occasional casual thievery …

It was good to see him doing better.

“How many idiots left?” he asked.

“Eleven,” she said.

“That’s higher than I can count.”

“Unless you’re doing shots in a drinking contest,” Marasi said.

“Damn right,” he said.

Together they peeked out from around the equipment—which was for nailing lids to crates. Wayne immediately yanked her back under cover. A bullet moving in slow motion hit the perimeter of the speed bubble, then zipped through the air above them in a flash before hitting the other side and slowing again. Bullets behaved erratically when they hit speed bubbles, and you could never tell which way they’d turn when entering one.

“Guy in the suit is escaping out the back,” Wayne said. “You want to grab him, or do you want to stay here and fight the rest of them?”

She bit her lip, considering. “We’ll have to split up,” she said. “You’re better with groups. You think you can handle this lot?”

“Aren’t most of these boxes full of stuff what goes boom?”

“Yes…”

“Sounds like fun to be had!”

“You should have another eight minutes or so on the grenades.”

“Great,” he said. “I’ll see if I can take those sods alive. I can grab them one at a time from their slowness bubbles, using my bubbles to counteract. See, I’ve been practicing, been gettin’ good at making mine bigger and smaller. Should be able to walk to the edge of one of your bubbles, put up mine in a way to overlap one person, then pull them out.”

“Wayne!” she said. “That’s amazing. Have you told Wax? It’s really hard to control the size of your bubbles like that.”

He shrugged. “You ready?”

She retrieved the flash-bangs from her pouch and handed one to him. Then she pulled the pin on the other to light the fuse. “Ready,” she said. Even if he had “plenty,” bendalloy was rare and expensive. They needed to be careful with it.

Wayne dropped the bubble, and she tossed the flash-bang. After it detonated, they scrambled out on opposite sides of the machine. Wayne went for the last group of gangsters while she dashed after the Cycle, who vanished through a reinforced metal door at the rear of the cavern. She reached it a moment later and picked the lock fairly easily. She spared a glance for Wayne—who was quickly being surrounded by enemies. He'd found cover behind a box marked EXPLOSIVES. He winked at her, then pulled the pin on his flash-bang and dropped it inside.

Delightful. Hopefully he knew what he was doing. Wayne's healing abilities were extraordinary—but it was still possible for him to take so much damage he couldn't heal. Any blast that separated his metalminds from the bulk of his body would leave Wayne dead, just like the Lord Ruler when he'd lost the Bands of Mourning centuries before.

Well, she couldn't monitor Wayne all the time. And *she* most certainly *couldn't* survive an explosion of … well, of any size. She slipped through the door and pulled it closed with a loud *thump*. The entire cavern complex shook a few moments later, but she focused on her task: heading into the dark cavern tunnel after the Cycle, who—among everyone in the cavern—was most likely to have answers for her.

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5

Wax trudged across the floor of the Senate, and others gave him space. They seemed to not want to face him—even those who had voted with him. They turned away as he passed, stretching and chatting.

In the hall, he headed toward his chambers, crossing over inlaid floors and beneath a row of chandeliers. Crystal and marble. This was his life now. Everything he'd fled as a young man ornamented each footstep, and the shadows seemed darker now, despite the twinkling light from above.

He believed his accomplishments as a senator could far outshine his accomplishments as a lawman, in terms of the raw good done to help the most people possible. That meant his failures carried much higher stakes. In the Roughs you depended on your gun, your instincts, and your ability to ask the right questions. Here he had to depend on others to do the right thing. And so far there had been no greater test of his faith in humanity—serial killers included—than working with politicians.

He shoved into his chambers and found his family and Kath, the governess, there already. He tried not to let his displeasure show, but Max still sensed the mood, staying back with Kath and playing with his Soonie pup.

"Well," Wax snapped, throwing himself into his seat, "there goes over a year of work."

"We did everything we could," Steris said, settling down beside him.

"Did we?" Wax asked, glancing at her stack of notebooks. "I know you have *six* of those full of new ways to try to persuade individual senators. If we'd had more time…"

"We did everything it was *reasonable* for us to do," she said, "accounting for our other obligations." Then she hesitated. "Didn't we, Wax?"

He met her eyes, and saw she was trembling. Hell. This would be just as hard for her, wouldn't it? *Pay attention, you rusting idiot.* He took her hands and squeezed them.

"We did," he said. "We tried with everything we had, Steris. In the end though, it wasn't our decision."

He squeezed her hands tightly. Steris was incredibly stable—she'd been there for him ever since his return to Elendel, though he'd never imagined how much she would come to mean to him. In that moment though, he felt her shaking. And … rust him if he wasn't doing the same himself. They'd poured *so much* into stopping this bill. And every *single* rusting senator he'd talked to had said they needed more time. Now they voted like this? Now they—

No. It's done.

"We need to move forward," he said.

"Yes. Forward." She nodded, then looked around. "And maybe get out of this building for a while. Currently, all that's going through my mind are the various ways a convenient natural disaster could turn it to rubble."

Wax grunted, and helped Steris gather the rest of their things. As they did, Wax saw an envelope on the corner of his desk. That hadn't been there before, had it? Picking it up, he felt something heavy slide to the corner. A bullet?

No, he discovered after slipping it open. An earring. And with it a small note. *You'll need to make a second, once the proper metal arrives.*

He had no idea what that meant. And he didn't care. *Not today, Harmony,* he thought. *Leave me alone.*

"What's that?" Steris said.

"Something from Harmony," Wax said.

She paused, looking at him.

"So, likely," he added, "something useless."

Steris drew her lips to a line. She was a Survivorist, and didn't strictly worship Harmony, who was seen as the god of the Path—a distinct but complementary religion. Still, after all they'd done and the things he'd seen, Steris had adopted a somewhat … cross-denominational view of God. At any rate, she knew he'd once worshipped Harmony.

These days … Well, he and God had history. Wax felt he'd overcome his worst problems with Harmony, ever since their conversation directly before he'd donned the Bands of Mourning. But that didn't stop Wax from making the occasional snide remark. Today, he shoved the envelope in his back pocket and put it out of his mind.

They packed up their things—rusts, with kids there were so many *things* to cart around. Steris wanted another child, but Wax worried about that. He didn't fancy being outnumbered.

But then again … he couldn't help smiling as Max went running down the hall, making his Soonie pup leap between black squares of marble, avoiding the white ones. Wax didn't normally see the other senators with families; they claimed that having children in the building wasn't respectful. But if they respected the building so much, why had they made a mockery of it with that vote?

A good number did vote as you wanted, Wax had to remind himself. *And others are scared. Of being seen as weak. Of outside interests. They're not all slag for voting against you. Remember that. There are some good ones. Same as in every profession.* It was just … well, he didn't want to think about that right now.

Outside the building, fleets of motor carriages had arrived to pick up senators. They'd drive off to parties, or appearances, or informal get-togethers. Even those who worked with Wax rarely invited him along unless they wanted to strategize. It was like they thought he was above simple socializing. Or maybe he made them uncomfortable.

As his family gathered to wait for their driver, Max tugged on his suit coat. "Is ya sad, Pa?" he asked loudly. "I hates the sads. Right bad, they is."

The way he said it caused several nearby senators to turn their noses up and sniff. Wax cocked an eyebrow. "Has Uncle Wayne been teaching you accents again?"

“Yeah,” Max said, softer. “Says I shouldn’t tell you though, so you’d think I was a genius for doing it on my own.” He smiled. “He told me to talk like that around the senators because it’ll upset them. And they need to be upset today, don’t they? Because they made you and Mother sad?”

Wax nodded, kneeling down. “You don’t need to worry about that though.”

“Know what makes me feel better when I’m sad?” Max asked.

“Hugging Tenny?” Wax said, patting the stuffed kandra on the head.

“Well, that,” Max said, “and … um … flying?” He looked at Wax with big, hopeful eyes.

Nearby, their motorcar pulled up to the curb and Hoid, the driver, stepped out. “Your carriage, sir,” he said, holding the passenger door. But rusts, who could deny a child when he looked at you like that?

“Thank you, Hoid,” Wax said. “Please take my wife wherever she would like to go. Kath, you have the harness?”

“I do, m’lord,” she said, handing Steris the baby, then digging into the enormous bag of extra clothing and washcloths. She tossed the harness to Wax, who gave her his coat and vest in exchange.

It gave him an impish stab of glee to pull on the leather harness and strap Max to his back in front of everyone. Then, with a fond kiss for Steris—and a promise to meet her at home—he dropped a bullet casing and turned toward the crowd.

“Don’t none of you get jealous or nothin’!” Max shouted. “He can give you a ride fer cheap, if you ask real nice and stop being a pile o’ bad turds!”

Yeah … maybe Wax should have a little talk with Wayne. But for now he waved to the crowd, then launched himself into the air, Max letting out a whoop of riotous glee.

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6

The tunnel Marasi entered bore signs of ancient civilization: the remnants of brick walls covering up the rough natural stone. A smooth floor, chiseled and graded. Sconces on the walls, now pocked with rust as if suffering some terrible disease.

She took out the last of her grenades, the one Wax had charged for her. These newer ones could hold a charge for hours—though by now the effect wouldn’t last long once activated. Three or four minutes at most. She still felt better holding it—and so, reluctantly, she set her rifle on the ground and instead drew her pistol. It also contained less metal than the rifle, making it a slightly better tool against a potential Allomancer. For the same reason, she left her pouch with extra metals, though she kept her belt with a few non-metal tools useful for fighting Allomancers.

Grenade and pistol in hand, she crept forward into the dim tunnel. The gang members had hooked some electric lights along the right wall, cords tied around the ancient sconces, but they flickered drowsily as if seconds from nodding off to sleep. She soon reached another vast open cavern but lingered at the entrance, crouching and inspecting the path ahead. The Cycle had come this way, and part of her wanted to scramble after him as fast as possible. The more careful part of her kept calm, watching for an ambush.

This particular cavern held a long, narrow rift running from her left to her right. An ancient stone bridge had spanned it, but it had fallen long ago—and instead a newer construction of boards and rope stretched across the perhaps sixteen-foot gap. About thirty feet of stone ground separated her from the chasm and bridge—and a tunnel in the wall on the other side continued the path forward.

She didn't go toward the bridge though. She hesitated, still at the mouth of the chamber. These brick walls were so old. Who had built them, centuries ago? Was this like the Originator Tomb in the heart of Elendel? Had people huddled in this cavern, their walls and bridge falling, as Harmony remade the world?

Regardless, she was worried. The Cycle had seen her; her instincts said he wouldn't just run off, his back exposed. He'd lay a trap. She looked carefully, and glimpsed a dark shape behind some rocks between her and the chasm. He was probably hoping she'd rush across the bridge, so he could shoot her from behind.

Unfortunately, as she spotted him, he rose and lifted a gun. Marasi activated the grenade—which she'd been holding close to her chest—by reflex. It let out a powerful Steelpush, ripping her pistol out of her hand and tossing it out in front of her. It fell straight into the chasm.

Her reaction had been just in time though, because the Cycle unloaded his pistol at her—and each shot missed, the bullets veering away and *snapping* into stone to either side of her. Marasi dashed straight at him, picking out his fine suit in the dim light. His features were more rugged than she'd expected. A thick neck, stubble on his chin.

She'd hoped he would be carrying metal, and her advance with the grenade would throw him off balance. Instead he merely lost his own pistol, which was Pushed across the chasm, hitting the wall on the other side and falling near the path over there.

Other than that, it appeared he—like Marasi—was wise enough not to keep much metal on his person.

"By the authority of the Fourth Octant Constabulary," she said, stopping ten feet or so from him, "you are under arrest for tariff avoidance, racketeering, and the illegal transport of weapons. You're unarmed and cornered. Do the smart thing and surrender."

Instead he grinned. Then began to grow.

His suit had buttons along the arms, which snapped open, giving more room as his muscles expanded to ridiculous proportions. His jacket stayed on, but also expanded through clever use of unsnapping wooden buttons along the sides.

Oh, hell. A Feruchemist. He didn't have the Terris look—but then, neither did Wayne. You couldn't always tell.

Marasi retreated. Getting into a fistfight with someone tapping strength was a quick road to a crushed face. Instead she switched off the grenade to conserve the rest of the charge, and ran for the bridge and the gun on the other side. The Cycle lunged forward and cut her off by placing himself directly in front of the bridge. There, with a laugh, he ripped apart the ropes holding it in place.

Okay. Feruchemists weren't like Allomancers. They couldn't just pop a new metal charge into their mouths and keep going. Maybe she could run him out of strength.

He dropped the rope, letting the whole wooden construct collapse. "Trell has wanted you in particular, lawwoman," he noted in a voice that seemed too high pitched for the enormous body. "So kind of you to deliver yourself to me."

Marasi turned and dashed for her rifle. Thumping footsteps chased her, gaining on her, forcing her to throw herself to the ground just before reaching the rifle. Her move let her narrowly dodge a grab.

She rolled as he punched, hitting the ground and grunting, then raising bloodied knuckles. Feruchemical strength could be dangerous—a lot of the Metallic Arts could hurt you. Her own included. She managed to dodge the next punches as well. Fortunately for her, the Cycle didn't seem practiced with his powers. Despite the prepared clothing, he obviously found it awkward to move and fight in this bulkier form.

What kind of Feruchemist didn't practice with their abilities? She scrambled for her rifle, getting to her knees and half lunging, half falling to grab it. He moved first, leaping over her with a powerful bound to snatch the gun. He then snapped it clean in half and hurled the barrel at her.

She barely activated the grenade in time, which bounced the barrel back at him—but she was holding the box awkwardly. It nearly slipped from her fingers at the jolt of force from the thrown object.

Steelpushes. Force transference. The Cycle wasn't the only one using powers they weren't practiced with.

She turned off the box as the Cycle dodged. The barrel of her rifle bounced against the rear wall and then rolled toward her. She reached for it, thinking to use it as a club.

Unfortunately, he lunged and seized her left arm, the one holding the box. His powerful grip squeezed her flesh, and *rusts*, it felt like he could crush her very bones. Cursing in pain, she scrambled at her belt and the sheath there. As her eyes started to water, she brought up a small glittering weapon and stabbed him straight through the arm.

He howled and dropped her, then yanked the bloody weapon free.

"Glass dagger," she said. "It's a classic."

He glared at her, then held up his arm. The bleeding wound began to heal.

Hell. Feruchemical healing? That proved it. She'd never met someone who naturally had two Feruchemical powers. He was using the forbidden art. Hemalurgy.

Marasi grabbed the rifle barrel and backed away, but their fight had positioned her so that she could only move toward the chasm. Each step took her farther from the doorway she'd come in through, where she might have been able to escape. Rusts.

She retreated, step by step, holding the barrel of her rifle in one hand, the grenade in the other. How much charge did it have left? In the chaos she hadn't tracked how much she'd used.

The Cycle followed, sticking her knife into his belt. Then, horribly, his eyes started to *glow* faintly red. "Trell is choosing hosts," he said. "Avatars, bestowed with his power. How would you like to be the accomplishment that proves I'm worthy of immortality, lawwoman? All you have to do is die."

She continued backward, her mind racing. He didn't seem worried he'd run out of strength anytime soon. Within moments, he had forced her up to the precipice of the chasm, near the clump of rocks he'd been hiding behind earlier. She put those between them, but they weren't very high.

A quick glance told her that the chasm now inches behind her was at least fifty feet deep. No escape in that direction.

"You've backed yourself up against a pit," he said, advancing. "Now what? Perhaps it's time to … what was it? Do the smart thing and surrender?"

Instead she set the grenade to go off on a few seconds' delay, then wedged it securely into a spot among the rocks. Then she gripped the barrel of her rifle under her arms and pressed it firmly against her chest.

He frowned. Then the grenade went off.

Force transference. Every Push creates an equal and opposite Push. The grenade shoved the rifle barrel, which hurled her backward with enormous force—straight across the chasm.

She *smashed* back-first into the wall. That was enough to stun her, but then the grenade's charge gave out. She dropped to the ground. Safely across the chasm as she'd planned, but winded and dazed.

Through teary eyes, she saw the Cycle run and leap across the chasm. So she scrambled, half-blinded by pain, searching the dusty stone, looking desperately for the pistol …

There!

He loomed overhead, a terrible shadow, his arm raised to smash her skull. In response, she delivered three shots straight into his face. He dropped.

Oh hell, she thought, sitting up despite the pain. Wax did things like this all the time. Leaping off cliffs, jumping around and slamming into things. How on *Scadrial* was his body not horribly ruined by it all?

She prodded at her ribs, hoping nothing was broken. Her left shoulder protested the most, and she winced. The pain was so distracting that she had to force herself to focus. A shot to the head should stop a Bloodmaker from healing, but some part of her insisted she should check anyway.

She lurched over to inspect the corpse. And found the bullet wounds pulling closed on the man's head, the holes in the skull resealing.

Rusting *hell*.

She heaved the slumped-over body onto its back and scrambled to pull her knife from his belt. He was healing from bullets to the head? Something was very wrong here. She shot him again, but that would only be temporary.

Instead, she ripped aside his shirt—revealing four spikes pounded in deep between his ribs. As she had suspected. Knife in hand, she began the gruesome work of digging the spikes out. She dug faster as she realized at least one of them was made of a strange metal with dark red spots like rust. One they'd been searching for *forever.*

The Cycle's eyes snapped open, despite his broken jaw and the holes in his skull. Marasi cursed and worked faster, bloodied fingers straining to pry out the first of the four spikes, which was so tightly embedded between his ribs it was difficult to yank free.

Those eyes. They were glowing a vivid red now.

"The ash comes again," the man said through bloody lips, his voice strangely grating. "The world will fall to it. You will get what you deserve, and all will wither beneath a cloud of blackness and a blanket of burned bodies made ash."

Marasi gritted her teeth, working on the rusty-looking spike, slick with blood.

"Your end," the voice whispered. "Your end comes. Either in ash, or at the hands of the men of gold and red. *Gold and—*"

Marasi yanked the spike out. The red glow faded and the body slumped, the healing stopping. She felt at the throat anyway, and even when she found no pulse, she dug out the other three spikes.

Then she finally leaned against the wall, groaning softly. Wayne had better have found a way to deal with those other thieves—because Marasi doubted she had the strength to lift a gun at the moment. Instead she closed her eyes, and tried not to think about that terrible voice.

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Max called for Wax to make each leap higher, faster. The boy’s shouts of glee carried over the rushing wind and flapping clothing. And rusts if that wasn’t infectious. Wax had been a solemn child, a trend that had continued into adulthood. But even he appreciated the rush that came from a well-executed Steelpush.

The sudden explosion of speed, the moment of stillness at the zenith. The lurch in the stomach as the plummet began. It wasn’t like any other experience a man could have—at least, not and survive.

In the distance a Malwish trade ship hovered into the city, flying using their strange ettmetal devices, as the two of them bounded across the city, afforded a view that was somehow reductive and expansive at once. From up so high, you could see the octant divisions along major roadways. You could understand and feel the different neighborhoods, the crunched-up forced familiarity of the slums, the expansive yet isolated grounds of the manors.

Once, Wax had assumed this kind of experience—not just the height, but the motion while traversing the city from above—would always be reserved for Coinshots. Then the Malwish airships had taken that assumption and tossed it out a window from three thousand feet.

Regardless, something about this perspective felt like it belonged to him. This was *his* city. He’d returned to it, and had—over the years—come to love it. It represented the best that people could achieve: a monument to ingenuity, a home to thousands of different ideas, types of people, and experiences.

At Max's urging he took them higher, using skyscrapers as his anchors to Push upward, back and forth, until they landed near the top of one building in particular: Ahlstrom Tower. The penthouse was their home, and Wax had picked it specifically. It was tough getting to the peak of a too-tall building with Steelpushes as your anchors ran out below. Fortunately, this one had several tall skyscrapers unusually close, and that gave him anchors to Push himself inward.

Today Wax didn't stop at their penthouse. He took them to the roof, where there was a little built-in platform for a worker to latch on and lower window-cleaning devices. Wax settled onto it and Max unhooked, though he was still tethered to the harness by a strong cord. Wax wasn't worried about its reliability. Steris had designed it.

Max took out a pouch of twirly-seeds and began dropping them off the side of the building, watching them go spinning down toward the busy street below. Despite the height, Wax could hear cars honking on the roadway. Six years, and there was barely a horse-drawn carriage to be seen in the arteries below. Progress here was like a wrecking crew. You moved with it or you became rubble.

The platform faced north. To his left, the shimmering waters of Hammondar Bay were a vast highway toward … well, he didn't rightly know what. The people of the Basin weren't explorers. For all their love of stories about Wax in his young days, or worse that fool Jak, most were content to enjoy their city. That was a problem with Elendel: it had everything you thought you'd need, so why go looking elsewhere? They hadn't even realized there was an entire Southern Continent out there until an airship had sailed up to investigate the Basin.

Yes, there had been expeditions since then. But most people were content here, and he couldn't blame them. His best efforts at improving life had been focused on the Basin. He didn't know what to do about the Malwish. Six years, and he still found the suddenly expansive size of the world intimidating.

Max hopped up and down with glee, throwing out an entire handful of twirly-seeds. The boy's fascination with heights made Kath uncomfortable—but that was what happened when, from infancy, you were often strapped to a father who found ordinary means of transportation too time-consuming.

Wax looked north toward the Roughs. Toward wonder, mystery, and a life he'd loved. He felt …

Rusts. He didn't feel sad.

He blinked, cocking his head. Ever since his return, Elendel had felt like a duty to him. Adventure and comfort had both been outside the city, calling to him. Though things had improved over the years, he'd continued to feel it. That call. Until …

Until today. Today, he remembered the parts of his life he'd loved in the north—but he didn't want them back. He had a life here he loved equally. Maybe more, judging by the warmth he felt as Max laughed. This … *this* was where he belonged. More, this was where he *wanted* to belong.

It felt calming to realize these things. He'd … finally stopped grieving, hadn't he?

With a grin of his own, he scooped Max up and gave the child a powerful hug—though Max had been too wiggly, even as a baby, to stand that sort of thing for long. Soon, at the boy's urging, they were playing a game of fetch, a variety Max had invented a few months back. Max tossed a wicker ball with a tiny metal weight at its center, then Wax tried to launch it onto the top of a nearby building. The wicker would keep it from doing damage if it fell, but the metal let him aim it. Once it was in place on a roof, they would jump over and retrieve it.

Max threw, but Wax struggled to get the ball to go far enough. "Toss it higher," he suggested to Max once they'd recovered it.

"If I throw it up," Max complained, "it will come down on our heads. I want to go onto that building over there."

"Height first," Wax said. "Trust me. The higher you throw it, the farther I can get it to fly."

Max tried again. With more height to the throw, Wax was able to land the ball on the rooftop Max wanted. Then they leaped after it. He wondered what the people in the neighboring skyscrapers thought of the frequent sight of a senator shooting past their windows with a child strapped to his back.

Unfortunately, the fun of the game could only distract him for so long. They'd been playing for half an hour when he topped a building and was confronted by an awesome sight. The Malwish ship he'd seen earlier had come closer.

The wooden construction, moved by giant fans, loomed in the air over Elendel. Wax had seen Basin attempts to design their own airships using helium or hot air. But the size of the cabin those ships could lift— in the most optimistic of projections—was nothing compared to what the Malwish could field. Their ship soared, a fortress in the sky.

This was no trade ship as he'd thought earlier. It was a warship. A show of force, though not an overtly hostile one—as it was approaching slowly and low in the sky. It was meant to make a statement, not a threat.

So, with Max strapped securely back into place, Wax launched them into the air toward the vessel, intent on finding out what was going on.

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Marasi eventually managed to find a service ladder to get her down into the chasm and back up the other side. Worn out, she approached the main chamber, shaken by what she’d heard and been forced to do. But she carried a small book of numbers and shipping dates she’d found on the corpse, and that looked promising.

She also carried something more dangerous. Four spikes. Curiously, the red-spotted one did not like touching the others—it pulled away from them if brought close. So she’d wrapped it in a bundle of cloth and kept them in separate pockets.

She stumbled through the reinforced metal door and found a scene of utter chaos. A large blast had set off several other explosions, judging by the scars on the ground. The cavern was littered with shrapnel, pieces of equipment, and an alarming number of bodies.

Wayne squatted in the center of it all, his clothes ripped, playing cards with a whole group of tied-up gangsters. He had their cards laid out on the floor in front of them—though their hands were tied behind their backs.

“You sure you want to lead with that one, mate?” Wayne asked, nodding at the card one of the men had tapped with his toe.

“It’s the high card,” the fellow said.

“Yeah, but are you *sure,*” Wayne said, eyeing his own hand.

“Um … I think so.”

“Damn,” Wayne said, laying down his hand. “I play three eights on the back of the nines. You win.”

“But…” another of the men said, “you know our hands … Why would you play it that way?”

“Gotta pretend I can’t see your cards, friends,” Wayne said. “Otherwise, where’s the sport in it? Cheatin’s one thing, but if I can just *see* what you’re going to do, then … well, might as well be playin’ with myself. And there are much funner ways to do that.”

Marasi stumbled up. He had fifteen of them in various states of captivity. Exactly as he’d said, he’d been able to use his speed bubble to counteract her slowness bubble and grab them one at a time. His control over his powers was increasingly impressive.

She wasn’t surprised he’d taken so many captive—Wayne preferred not to kill. It was something they agreed on. As for the card game, well … at this point his antics barely shocked her. She settled down on the remnant of a broken crate. “Wayne, I could have used your help.”

“By the time I had these chaps all trussed up,” Wayne said, “you already had that fellow in the suit down. I saw you restin’, and it seemed best to give you some time.”

She hadn’t even noticed. Rusts, her shoulder still hurt. She grimaced, looking around the room.

“So, uh,” Wayne said, “*damn.* Did you turn to cannibalism or something?”

Marasi looked down at her uniform, which was covered in blood. “Cannibalism? *That’s* where your mind went?”

“One sees a lady covered in blood,” Wayne said, “and it goes to a natural place: wonderin’ if maybe she feasts on the livers of the people what she defeated. Not that I’m judging.”

“Not judging?” Marasi said. “Wayne, that’s *absolutely* something you *should* judge someone for.”

“Right. Shame on you, then.”

She sighed. “Here I was thinking that I was finally used to your Wayneness.” She proffered the spikes, each six inches long with a thick head—save for the smallest, most interesting one, which was narrow and thin, barely four inches long. “I dug these out of the Cycle’s body. He would have come back to life, healing himself, if I’d left them in.”

"How?" he said. "It don't work that way."

"Did for him. This other spike might be why."

"Is that…"

"Trellium?" she said. "Yes. It has to be."

Wayne whistled softly. "We should celebrate. You save any liver for me?"

She gave him a flat stare, at which he just grinned. "We don't eat people," she said to the captives. "He's just joking."

"Aw, Marasi," Wayne said. "I've been workin' on my reputation with these blokes."

"We broke into their cavern," she said, "defeated their leader, blew up most of their goods, killed half of them and captured the rest. I think your reputation is fine." She narrowed her eyes, noticing that all of the captives were barefoot. "Dare I ask why you took off their shoes?"

"Shoelaces," Wayne said, and she glanced at their bound hands. "Old Roughs trick when you don't have enough rope." He nodded to the side, and the two of them stepped away to talk in private. "That's a lot of captives, Marasi, and shoelaces aren't going to hold them real well. Any moment now, one of them will pop out a knife I missed—or worse, a gun. So…"

"Instant Backup?" she asked.

"Rusts, I love that code name."

"As long as it gets me to a bath sooner, I'm for it. There should be a way up to the city through the door I used—and there's a ladder to the right, inside the chasm." She paused. "Check on the body for me? I have this terrible premonition that I missed a spike and he'll come looking for me."

"Got it," Wayne said. He surveyed the room. "Nice work."

"We blew the place up and killed the guy who had the most information."

"We survived," Wayne said, "stopped a gang of miscreants, protected the city, denied our enemies resources, and recovered some important metals. In my book we did a rustin' good job. You're too hard on yourself, Marasi."

Well … maybe she was. It was the sort of thing you learned, growing up as she had. So she nodded and let herself take the compliment, feeling some weight lift from her. Wayne jogged off, and she walked back to the tied-up gang of thugs, pistol held in a deliberately threatening way.

Judging by how they looked at her, she didn't need to do much to intimidate them. "You're the lucky ones," she said—mostly to distract them. "You're going to be treated fairly. So long as no one does anything stupid." She fished in her pocket, ignoring the book she'd taken from the Cycle for now, instead pulling out a notebook that was only *slightly* coated in blood. "I have a list of rights here I'm going to read to you. Listen carefully, so you know what options and legal protections will be available to you."

She opened the notebook and burned cadmium, tossing out a bubble of slowed time that covered them all. Hopefully they'd be distracted by her lecture, because if they were watching the perimeter they'd see the smoldering fires wink out too quickly.

That was probably the extent of the clues; there weren't as many tells in a cavern as there would be outside, where the motion of the sun, falling leaves, or passing bystanders would indicate exactly what was happening. As the minutes passed in slowed time for Marasi and the gangsters, Wayne would be jogging to the constabulary to get backup.

Marasi finished her recitation, then did a slow walk around the captives, pistol at the ready, metal burning within her. A few of them stilled as she passed; they'd been trying to work out the knots in their bindings. Wayne was right. This many captives presented a potentially volatile situation. Hopefully backup would come quickly.

For now though, she let herself think about the Cycle, whose dying words reminded her of what Miles Hundredlives had said when *he* had died. *One day, the men of gold and red, bearers of the final metal, will come to you. And you will be ruled by them.*

She touched the trellium spike in her pocket.

The ash comes again, the Cycle had said today.

That couldn't be true. The Catacendre had marked the death and rebirth of the world. Ashfalls were a thing of myths and old stories. Not something of these days, with their electric lights and petrol-powered autos. Right?

She shivered and glanced toward the door at the back of the cavern, eager to spot more constables. It was a relief when a blur indicated someone arriving. Marasi almost dropped the speed bubble, then paused as she saw it was only one person. Who was this? Wayne? The blurred figure zipped up to the perimeter of the bubble and stood there for a moment.

That gave Marasi just enough time—an eyeblink really—to pick out a female figure in dark clothing, a black cloth mask over her face. Not like a Malwish mask; more like one a thief might use, prowling in the night. She was slender, with straight black hair. Her eyes seemed to meet Marasi's, then she became a blur again.

Perhaps Marasi could have dropped the bubble, but it was over too quickly. Indeed, as she was still trying to sort through what had happened, a host of other blurs in constable brown entered the room. A second later, Wayne jumped into the slowness bubble. He activated his own powers and the two canceled each other out, creating a pocket of normal time around them.

Rust, could she get that good with her bubbles? Her schedule was so constrained that such experiments seemed impossible, but still … it was remarkable. And surreal, that she was now unaffected by her own slowness bubble. She turned back toward the frozen gangsters, one of whom had managed to untie himself and was trying to sneak away.

"You arrived just in time," Marasi said, noting the constables gathered around the bubble with nets and ropes. "Wayne … did you pass anyone on your way in?"

"No," he said, frowning. "Why? Your corpse is still out there, dead as when you deadified him."

"There was someone in here a moment ago," she said. "Maybe fifteen minutes ago regular time? She inspected us, then fled."

"Bizarre," he said. "You still have those spikes?"

She checked her uniform's pockets; three spikes on one side, one on the other, and they hadn't been disturbed. "Yes. Ready for the bubble to go down?"

He nodded and they dropped their bubbles, letting Marasi shout orders to the constables. They moved in methodically, taking the man who'd been about to escape, tightening the bonds on the others. Constable medics checked the dead just in case, and others moved in to gather evidence. Well, the evidence Wayne hadn't detonated.

"Come on," Wayne said. "They can handle this. We should show Wax what we found."

"Well, after some cleaning up," she said. "Judging by how you smell, Wayne, I don't want to *know* how *I* smell. But yes. We need to talk to Waxillium."

About more than just the spikes. About glowing red eyes, and cryptic deaths. *You will get what you deserve, and all will wither beneath a cloud of blackness and a blanket of burned bodies made ash.* She left the scene to the other constables, following Wayne as he led the way out.

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9

A warship’s arrival was certainly an event, but not an unprecedented one. They visited now and then, with permission.

Even its low altitude, unfortunately, was higher than Wax could reach with his Allomancy. He’d need a metal anchor of incredible size to Push himself that high—either that or he’d need … well, metals he no longer had access to.

There had been a time when he’d borne them all. A transcendent flash of incredible strength—as if he’d touched the Well of Ascension itself. But it was best not to dwell too long on his experience with the Bands of Mourning, lest he make all other moments seem dull by comparison.

Today, he made himself known by leaping up in a few high bounds near the ship. They sent a small skimmer down to collect him and Max, giving them medallions to decrease their weight, though Wax didn’t need one. It intimidated the masked Malwish airmen when he handed his back—a reminder that he was Twinborn.

Of the five different nations that made up the Southern Continent, the Malwish—these people—were the ones Wax had interacted with the most. They were the only nation that had sent an ambassador to Elendel. And increasingly, all official interactions with the South went through them. From what he’d been able to gather, these last six years had shaken up Southern Continent politics even more than they had Basin politics. Once-tempestuous rivalries had stilled, and unity had been forged. Why squabble with one another when there were actual *devils* to the north who might invade at any moment? Never mind that Wax's people couldn't even make airships yet.

A few minutes later the skimmer—which was shaped a little like an open-topped flying fishing boat—docked with the larger ship. Max was unstrapped by now and stood patiently, holding Wax's hand. Getting to board a real airship was so exciting that Wax could feel him trembling. Indeed, as they stepped onto the main ship—into a corridor made of dark wood, the walls bowing outward at the center like a tube—Max saluted the person waiting for them.

The man was the captain, judging by his intricate mask. Wooden, but carved and inlaid with six different metals in a pattern around the eyes. The man glanced at the child but made no move to salute back, as the constable officers cheekily did when Max saluted them. He didn't raise his mask either.

"Honored Metalborn," the captain said, nodding to Wax, "and … unless I miss my guess, Honored Once-Bearer of the Bands?"

"That's me," Wax said.

"And also taker of the Bands, which should have been restored to their rightful people."

"Also me. I delivered them to the kandra, as agreed—to be held so that no nation could control them or their power. If you need to be reminded."

They were silent for a few moments, staring at one another.

"I am Admiral Daal," the man said—sounding reluctant. "Welcome to my former ship, Blessed Thief."

"Former?" Wax asked.

"I've been chosen to be the new ambassador from the Malwish Consortium to your nation."

Malwish … Consortium? It seemed the unification of the South had been completed. "What about Jonnes?" Wax asked.

"She will be returning home," Daal said. "It has been determined that she has been too … familiar."

Wonderful. A political shift indeed. It was probably best not to say too much more than simple pleasantries, to avoid inflaming tensions by accident. "Then let me be the first senator to welcome you to the Basin," Wax said. “I look forward to continued peace and favorable trade between our nations.”

“Favorable?” Daal said. “For you, perhaps.”

“We’ve both benefited. You’ve had access to our Allomancers.”

“*Limited* access,” he said. “Far too limited compared to the rich accommodations you have received.”

“Three skimmers?” Wax asked. “A handful of medallions? All essentially useless without the ability to maintain them on our own or create more.”

“Surely you don’t expect us to give up the *means* of our production? One sells the goods, not the *factory*.”

Every time they tried to get more information on medallions from people in the know, they got stonewalled. Obviously these were Malwish trade secrets, which explained part of it, but interviewing Allik they were able to consistently pick out discrepancies in what he said and what they actually saw. Why weren’t there Feruchemical soldiers in the Malwish army with extremely heightened strength, mental speed, or other dangerous Feruchemical talents? Why weren’t there Allomancer medallions? The more they learned, the more certain Wax became that there was a secret there, indicating the medallions were not as effective or as versatile as the Malwish would like people to believe.

Right, Wax thought. *About not inflaming tensions by accident …* He was quiet, staring at the admiral. Air as tense as a midday duel.

Then Max tugged his sleeve. “Uh … Dad?”

“Yes?” Wax said, not looking down.

“I need the potty.”

Wax sighed. Tense diplomatic situations were not improved by the presence of a five-year-old. But it could have been worse—he could have brought Wayne instead.

“Is there one available?” Wax asked Daal.

“He can wait.”

“Do you have children, Ambassador?”

“No.”

“Five-year-olds do not wait.”

After another tense moment, the admiral sighed and spun on his heel, leading the way past masked sailors. Wax followed with his son. Years spent near Allik and others from the South had taught Wax to be comfortable around those masked faces. It was still hard to not feel intimidated by that line of shadowed eyes. Not a one speaking, not a one lifting their mask. Wax had laughed and drunk with Malwish in the past, but this crew seemed a different class entirely.

Daal presented the restroom with a gesture.

“Wow!” Max said, peeking in, the electric light flickering on inside. “It’s so *small*. Like it’s made for me!”

“Quickly, son,” Wax said.

Max closed the door and hummed softly as he did his business. Wax stood with the admiral, feeling awkward. He actually found himself wishing for Wayne, who had a way of breaking tension like this—by creating a different variety of tension entirely. One which allowed you and your presumed antagonist to share a moment of mutual embarrassment, maybe even understanding.

I wonder if he does that on purpose, Wax thought. It was hard to tell with Wayne. At times he seemed deeply insightful. He inevitably ruined that impression. But you couldn’t help wondering …

“The Bands of Mourning,” Daal said. “They are safe, yah?”

“I assume so,” Wax replied. “I haven’t seen them since we delivered them.”

“I passed the gun emplacements at the city perimeter,” Daal said. “I’ve been told about those. The maximum range straight up is what, a thousand feet? Maybe two?”

Wax didn’t respond. It was a little more than that, but … honestly not much, at least not straight upward, despite what propaganda would claim. And though the skimmers that had been delivered to the Basin had a maximum altitude of around fifteen hundred feet, he knew that some Malwish ships could sail so high that the air grew thin and men would die if they remained there too long.

“One wonders,” Daal said, “what would have happened if our people had met during a more … warlike era. Why, one quick bombing campaign and your city would fold like an old flag.”

“Fortunate,” Wax said, “that we met now instead.”

The admiral turned toward him, eyes peeking out through metal-encrusted holes. “What would you have done?” he asked. “If we had simply attacked?”

“I don’t know,” Wax said. “But I think you’d have had a harder time of it than you believe.”

“Curious, how often your papers repeat the same lines,” Daal said. “Boasts about the kandra assassins and Allomancer soldiers. When I know that your demon immortals *can’t* kill. And your Allomancers? Tell me, how did you reach this ship? By your own power, or…?”

What a delightful individual.

“Of course,” Daal said, “we don’t live during such … brutal times. I am not here to start a war, Honored Twinborn. Do not look so offended. But I represent many among us who feel your people have taken advantage of our … lenient nature. In particular with the Bands of Mourning. They are ours, and should reside with us.”

Wax wanted to leap to arguments. Explain the Bands had been found in *Basin* territory. That they’d been created by someone from the North, not the South. That a deal had been fairly agreed. But this man was baiting him, and—whatever he’d done in the past—Wax didn’t speak for Elendel. He was only one representative out of many.

He refused to be goaded. “Then,” he said, “that is a discussion you may have with the governor and our legislature. And perhaps with God.”

The masked admiral regarded him, saying no more. But rusts, if tensions were getting worse …

This is the absolute worst time, Wax thought with frustration. With the Supremacy Bill passed, there was a real chance the Basin would crumble as a political entity. How would the South respond to that? Daal said he didn’t want war, but what if the South saw the Basin as easy pickings?

Their initial encounters had wowed the Southerners. A northern land full of Metalborn and walking myths? But the longer they’d interacted, the more each side had recognized the ordinary nature of the other. Myths became men. And every society knew how to kill other men.

Max finally came out, holding up his wet hands to prove he'd washed them. Daal marched them back down the corridor, where Wax strapped his son into the harness again.

"It is good to meet you, Ladrian," the ambassador said. "Good for me, yah? It shows which stories I should believe."

"And which are those?"

"The true ones, of course," Daal said, and gestured for one of his airmen to open the doors, revealing the city below. "I trust my time here will be profitable. Good day, Senator."

With a sigh, Wax threw himself out of the airship—accompanied by a whoop from Max, who seemed to consider this encounter the highlight of an absolutely wonderful day.

Wax slowed them carefully with some Pushes, then sent them through a series of quick leaps back to Ahlstrom Tower. The penthouse had a landing platform, and moments later the two of them burst into their suite—Wax carefully locking the door behind them.

Steris was putting Tindwyl down for her nap, but walked out to the front room a short time later—to find Max playing with a puzzle while Wax mixed himself a drink.

"Mother!" Max said, looking up. "I got to *poop* on an *airship*!"

"Oh!" she said, with the enthusiasm for the topic only a mother could muster. "That's exciting!"

"I got some strange toilet paper!" he said, lifting it up. "It's white instead of brown! Traded for it just like Uncle Wayne says!"

"Oh. And what did you leave in exchange, dear?"

"Well," he said, "you know…"

"Right. Of course." Steris joined Wax behind the bar, slipping her hand around his waist. "What happened?"

"New ambassador," Wax said. "Doesn't much like us. Wants the Bands back. Made some vague threats."

"Delightful day for that," she said.

"You were right about the unification timetable," Wax said. "The ambassador will announce a new consortium of states under the Malwish banner."

“That won’t help our work,” Steris said. “The Elendel Senate will see today’s bill as building a nation out of squabbling cities, a counterpoint to Malwish imperialism.”

“Conquest by another name,” Wax said, nursing his drink. He’d occasionaly disparaged Elendel whiskey … but the truth was, some of the stuff you could get here was fantastic. Strong flavored, smoky and complex. He’d come to like it better than Roughs varieties—and it was far, far better than whatever Jub Hending had made in his tub, which peeled off layers of skin as a punishment for drinking it. He did still miss good Roughs beers though.

“Well, I do have some potentially good news,” Steris said, slipping a letter out of her pocket—she refused to wear skirts without them, no matter how fashionable they were. “It came while you were away.”

He slipped the card out.

> *Meet us at the mansion at 3:00. Exciting news.*
>
> *—Marasi*

They shared a look.

“Do we bring Max or not?” Wax asked softly.

“How likely is it to involve explosions?” Steris asked.

“With us, you never can tell…”

“He stays here with Kath, then. His history tutor is coming anyway.”

Wax nodded. “I’m going to wash up, and then we can leave.”

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10

Marasi felt about a thousand times better when she arrived at the Fourth Octant Constabulary headquarters, showered and cleaned up, wearing her preferred uniform of a vest and jacket over a calf-length skirt.

As a special detective, she technically wasn't required to be in uniform, but she usually wore one anyway. The uniform was a symbol. It meant she represented something bigger than herself: the people of the Basin and the good of all. The uniform comforted those who saw her—at least those who were happy to have a constable around. And if it gave warning to those who were up to something, then that was part of the reason for the law.

As she entered, younger constables in the main headquarters room lowered their reports and conversations hushed, all eyes turning to Marasi. Then came the applause.

Rusts, that always felt so weird. You weren't supposed to be *applauded* by your coworkers, were you? More than one new constable—most of them women—watched her with wide eyes as she passed. Marasi knew that she had specifically inspired both Wilhelmette and Gemdwyn to join up last year.

That left her conflicted. On one hand, she'd rather the broadsheets stop writing stories about her. On the other hand, if it was inspiring other women …

Either way, she was glad to stride into the back rooms, passing the offices of the higher-ranked constables. Even a few of these called out congratulations. She stopped and chatted with a few, asking after their own investigations. Though she just wanted to be on with her work, this was important too. You never knew when you'd need another constable's expertise.

Besides. It was *good* to have friends among her peers. Finally.

Eventually she neared Reddi's office. She passed Constable Gorglen on his way out—the tall man's head almost brushed the ceiling. He nodded to her and made way, and she found Reddi inside the large rear office, frowning at his desk. His drooping mustaches had greyed in recent years, and she knew the uniform of the constable-general weighed on him. He was more politician than officer these days, spending half his time in meetings with the city leaders.

"Constable Colms," he said, scratching his chin. "Can you make any sense of this?" He showed her the drawing, which proved to be a crude sketch of Constable Gorglen as a giraffe hiding in a constable's uniform. It said *Approved by Expert Types* at the bottom.

"I'll talk to Wayne," she promised.

Reddi sighed, then slipped the paper into a very large folder on the corner of his desk—the one where he kept complaints about Wayne. Reddi had evidently stopped returning it to the cabinet.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said.

"Sorry?" he asked. "Rusts, constable. *Sorry*? How many people did you two bring in today? At any rate, don't apologize for him—I've got a feeling if you weren't keeping Constable Wayne in check, this folder would be ten times as thick."

She smiled. "He does do best when channeled toward … productive activities."

Reddi grunted, picking up another folder. "Don't tell him this, but his imitation of me is amusing. Though you should know, those two men with the bowler hats were looking for him again."

"Any idea who they are?" she asked.

"Some accounting firm, probably their collections department," Reddi said. "It … seems Wayne owes money to some important people this time, Marasi. The kind of people that even I can't dissuade."

“I’ll figure it out,” she said with a sigh. Harmony’s Bands … she hoped Wayne hadn’t stolen something truly valuable.

“I’ll leave that to you then.” Reddi rapped the folder with his knuckles. “The governor has been breathing down my neck asking for evidence the Outer Cities were siphoning off weapons, and you provided it. Thank you, Marasi. Really.”

“I hope to deliver even more, sir,” she said. “I have a notebook from their leader, and it has some interesting shipping manifest information.” She pulled the book out, then held it open to show him. “We’ll want to make copies, get it through research and code cracking in case I’ve missed something, but I’ve already read some curious things.”

She tapped a list near the front. “This,” she said, “is a series of tests the Cycle was overseeing to determine what can be shipped into Elendel without being stopped by customs or raising red flags with inspection agents.”

“Wait,” Reddi said. “*Into* Elendel?”

“Exactly,” Marasi said.

“It’s not illegal to ship things into Elendel,” he said. “This group was breaking the law by smuggling things *out.*”

“Which is why this is so intriguing,” she said. “The shipping list is all very mundane, too. Foodstuffs, lumber … but they’ve noted which ones were inspected, which package sizes were suspicious, all of that.”

“I find this … vaguely unnerving,” he said. “I don’t have any idea what it means, and that’s even worse.”

“I’m going to dig into it,” Marasi promised. “For now, I’ll get some of these other pages copied by the scribes. They’ll give you hard evidence that the explosives and weapons we found today were going to be smuggled to Bilming. That shipment *was* leaving the city, as have many others.” She hesitated. “I’ve had an idea.”

“Go on…”

“I’ll need authorization to work outside the city for a while … and if possible, we need to keep this news from the press for a few days. That means quieting the other constables. I know it will be hard, but it will help me chase down the people these men were going to supply.”

“What are you planning?”

“According to this book, someone in Bilming is expecting a shipment soon. Weapons, explosives, and … food.”

“That matches what we found in the cavern,” Reddi said, looking at the initial reports. “Lots of food.”

That was curious. Why would they be smuggling dried foods to the Outer Cities? Were these soldier or sailor rations?

“Regardless,” Marasi said, “the Set tends to run silent in times like this. I didn’t see any radio equipment down there—they were deep enough that a signal couldn’t get out anyway. So our enemies probably don’t know their team has fallen. Which means…”

“… *We* could send in the shipment,” Reddi said. “And perhaps capture the people who are behind all of this.”

“Or at least move one step farther up the chain.”

“They’d be expecting to meet with one of their own,” Reddi said, rubbing his chin. “We couldn’t maintain the subterfuge for long.”

“Well, sir,” Marasi said, “we *do* have the Cycle’s corpse.”

“There are a lot of people who don’t believe in this shadowy organization you’re chasing, Colms,” he said. “You know that, right?”

“What do you believe, sir?”

“All those people we interviewed six years ago were certainly up to something,” he said. “I’m still not a hundred percent sure it wasn’t merely an Outer Cities plot—and the idea of some kind of evil god doesn’t sit well with me. But honestly, I’ve learned not to bet against you.”

“You do have to admit,” Marasi said, “at the very least, that Waxillium’s uncle was involved in some kind of paramilitary group.”

“Yes,” Reddi said, “and *someone* assassinated him in prison—along with the others who followed him. If you say that was the Set, I believe you. But I need you to be aware—the governor and his people want our official focus to be on the Outer Cities and the threat they present to Elendel supremacy, not on some secret society that might be pulling their strings.”

“Understood, sir,” she said. “But I think this could accomplish both goals. Most of the people we caught were common street thugs—not actual Set members. I’ll bet the only one down there who had any real contact with the Set was the man who had this book. It mandates radio silence from inside the city, to not be overheard, in the days leading up to a drop-off—so no one in Bilming is expecting to hear from him. I believe we can surprise them. Particularly since we have that corpse."

"Wait," Reddi said, "how does a corpse help us?"

"I figured I'd ask Harmony to lend us a kandra to imitate the dead man for the operation. Wayne could be a generic lackey, speaking with a Bilming accent, to help shore up the subterfuge."

"Oh. Um. Right." Reddi got uncomfortable when she implied she was close with Harmony—and doing so was a little cheeky on her part, since she'd never met him herself. She knew Death far better than she knew God.

Regardless, Reddi didn't like being involved with the kandra—Faceless Immortals had made him uncomfortable ever since the business with Bleeder. He'd probably prefer she did her thing and didn't mention how. But, well, she wanted everything to be on the up-and-up.

The department deserved to know how she got her results—she didn't accomplish them without things like Malwish tech on loan from Allik, or access to Faceless Immortals. She'd originally hoped that by making all this clear, her reputation would drop to more reasonable levels. She'd been wrong. Still, that had its advantages.

"My reform suggestions?" Marasi asked. "About how we police slums, and the proper training of constables? How is that going?"

"The other constables-general have agreed to the articles," he said. "All but Jamms, but I think after today he'll listen. Just need to get the governor to sign off on the ideas." He narrowed his eyes. "I like this shipment plan of yours. Get me a detailed proposal."

"Will do, sir. We'll need to move quickly."

"You will have the full support of the department," Reddi said. "The governor is going to be so pleased with today's results that I can all but guarantee you extra funding if your operation requires it. I'll wait for that proposal, but in the meantime I'll have some people get to work on replacing the supplies that were destroyed today."

"Thank you, sir," she said, taking a deep, satisfied breath.

"Something wrong, constable?" he asked.

“No, sir,” she said. “Just … appreciating the path I’ve walked, and where it’s led me.”

“Appreciate it on your own time, constable!”

She eyed him, and he returned a rare grin.

“It’s the sort of thing I’m supposed to say,” he explained. “The governor likes it when I’m gruff. Fits his expectations better, I suppose. Oh, before I forget. Constable Matieu says you had something specific you wanted to show me? Something that’s not in the reports. Was that the book?”

“That and a little more, sir,” she said, taking the spikes from her shoulder bag. “I want you to turn these three in to the scientists at the university.” She held up the thinner fourth one. “I’m going to keep this one for a bit though.”

“Ruin…” Reddi whispered. “Is that … atium?”

“No, though it’s nearly as mythical. We think it’s trellium, a metal from offworld.”

He eyed her. Talk of other worlds didn’t sit right with him either, and she suspected he’d never fully accepted what she said about Trell.

“Isn’t that the stuff they used to blow up the prison?” Reddi asked.

“I don’t know if I believe that story,” Marasi said. “There’s no proof Wax’s uncle had any of this on him.”

“Still,” Reddi said, “be careful with that. If it’s half as bad as ettmetal…”

“I’ll be careful,” she said. “I plan to deliver it to Lord Ladrian for study.”

Reddi grunted. “I thought he was retired.”

“Depends,” Marasi said, tucking the trellium spike back into her shoulder bag. “For this, you should consider him on the case.”

“Well, I never revoked his constable privileges.” Reddi wiped his brow with his handkerchief. “Just try to keep him from … causing any incidents. When he’s involved, things tend to get … unsettling.”

“I’ll do what I can, sir.”

“He doesn’t have any other hidden apocalyptic family members or half-sane wives with mystical powers, does he?”

“If any show up, I’ll have him file a report. And maybe move confrontations with them to next quarter, for budgetary reasons.”

Reddi smiled. “I’m glad you’re out there, Colms. Not just for my career. I’m glad there’s someone rational around, to … you know, balance the insanity. Go. Chase your mysteries, and let me know what you need.”

She nodded, feeling a deep satisfaction as she left his office and walked back down the hallway. She had achieved so much—both in life and in this case. She had done it; she’d *arrived.*

And is this all? She tucked that annoying thought away and hurried to the commissary, where she grabbed a sandwich and began stuffing it down. She didn’t have long until her meeting with Wax. Still, Marasi was only halfway done when the cleaning lady came to take her tray.

“Actually, I still have half,” Marasi said, holding up the rest of her sandwich.

“Thanks,” the lady said, taking the sandwich from Marasi’s hand and taking a bite. “I was hungry.”

“Wayne,” Marasi said with a sigh, looking closer at his face. “What are you doing?”

“Hidin’ from those bean counters.”

“The two men with the suits and bowlers?” Marasi said. “They bothered Captain Reddi about you again, Wayne. Who do you owe money to this time?”

“None of your business,” he said around another bite of her sandwich. One might have thought he’d look silly in a serving woman’s apron and cap, but—with the fake breasts—he wore it well. Wayne could never be accused of poor fashion sense. Just poor taste.

“I think it *is* my business,” Marasi said.

“No, it *ain’t*,” Wayne said. “I’ll make sure they don’t bother old Reddi no more. You contacted Wax?”

“I sent him a note. Meeting at three o’clock.”

“Then why are we wasting time playin’ dress-up?” Wayne said. “We got work to do!”

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11

Wax landed at the front doors to Ladrian Mansion, his ancestral home. Steris let go of his waist—as always, she'd clung to him with a death grip while flying, but had worn a gleeful grin the entire time.

They walked up the steps, and Wax undid the locks with a few Steelpushes in a specific sequence, causing the door to swing open before them. Others could use a set of keys, but few occupied the place any longer. The staff had moved to the tower along with Wax and Steris. These days the place had a single tenant, who stayed there off and on.

Wax called out, "It's just us, Allik!"

Aside from giving the Malwish man a place to stay, the mansion had—over the years—undergone a small transformation. Space in the Ahlstrom Tower penthouse was tight, so Wax and Steris kept their projects and hobbies here.

Upstairs, Steris had *three* rooms for her ledgers, notebooks, and catalogues—which she liked to look through in her spare time. The things she thought they'd need—delivered these days via mail order—might have overwhelmed a lesser household. However, having repeatedly benefited from her preparations, Wax didn't feel he had reason to object.

Steris went to the washroom to fix her hair after the flight, but Wax paused next to the door, where a pair of long Roughs dusters hung on the wall. One was white, and the other—his old one—was sliced into two layers of thick ribbons. A mistcoat. Each coat had a Roughs hat on a peg above it. It wasn't quite a shrine. Because one of the people it represented wasn’t dead; he’d just moved on to a different kind of adventure. Still, Wax paused, kissed his fingertips, then pressed them to the wood beneath Lessie’s hat. Again, it wasn’t quite a ritual. It was merely something he did.

A moment later, a masked head popped out above the banister on the second level. “Oh, hi!” Allik said. His current mask was bright red, with flakes of yellow paint radiating from the center. It always made him look eager, like his face was sweating sunlight. Then he raised it, and his toothy grin beamed even more brightly.

For all his short, spindly figure and somewhat embarrassing beard, Allik was a force to be reckoned with. At least when it came to his pastries.

“A new batch is almost done!” he called to Wax. “O Hungry One!”

“Don’t start that again, Allik,” Wax snapped. “And I didn’t come here because I’m hungry.”

“But you’ll still eat, yah?”

“Yah,” Wax admitted.

“Great!” He slammed his mask back down and disappeared into his room on the second floor, where he kept the fireplace running overtime. He’d had an oven installed as well, because the Malwish could never have too much heat. He was technically a “junior goodwill ambassador” to the Basin, a title he’d earned two years ago by being willing to take up semipermanent residence in Elendel. Wax had been glad to see it. Allik had been fooling no one with his constant “coincidental” trips up here to see Marasi.

Besides. His pastries were … well, they were *really* good.

Marasi and Wayne were apparently running late, so Wax went to brew some tea while Steris fetched “a few” of her ledgers from upstairs. She came wobbling back balancing some two dozen of them, then plopped down on a couch in the sitting room. Wax gave her a cup of tea, then—frowning—went looking for the source of an odd smell.

He’d just found half an old meat bun in the pocket of his mistcoat when a dog came trotting in through the front door. A large grey- and-white short-haired animal that almost reached Wax’s waist.

“Hey,” it said with a feminine voice. “Did you bring Max?”

“No,” Wax said. “I wanted to run some experiments, and you know how those get.”

“Explody?” the dog—MeLaan—asked. “Well, damn. I kept this body on for no good reason.”

“Do you actually *like* playing fetch?” Wax asked, disposing of the moldy meat bun. “From what I can gather, most of you hate nonhuman bodies.”

“Yeah, they’re demeaning,” MeLaan said, settling down on her haunches. “Except a body … influences you. It’s hard to explain to mortals. Think of it like an outfit. If you’re dressed up all fancy in a glittering gown, you want to dance and twirl. If you’re wearing trousers with an axe over your shoulder, well, you’re going to want to smash something. I only put bodies like this on when a mission requires it. But once I’ve got it on…” She shrugged, a gesture that looked distinctly odd in the dog’s body. “But no fetch for me today. I’ll go change.”

She wandered off toward the room where Wax let her store her other bodies: bones, hair, nails. Most of the bones weren’t real, fortunately. She much preferred what the kandra called True Bodies, made of stone, crystal, or metal.

He had joined Steris in the sitting room and was halfway through the latest broadsheet—a boy delivered some each day for Allik—when he heard Marasi and Wayne tromp into the foyer. Loud as a freight train, those two could be. He shook his head, sipping his tea.

“In here!” Steris called, and Wayne burst in a moment later. “Wayne. Could you *sometime* remember to brush your feet off before you track mud in? This isn’t the Roughs.”

“Be glad it’s just mud,” he said. “We been through the bowels of the earth today, Steris, and it was full o’ stuff what’s normally in bowels.”

“A perfectly awful description,” she said.

“Oh, stop complainin’ at me,” he said, hopping from one foot to the other. “We got news. We got news!”

Marasi strode up and pulled something long and thin from her pouch. A single delicate spike, like a long nail with a needle point. The otherwise silvery metal had reddish patches to it, especially visible when it caught the light.

Wax breathed in sharply. “You got one. How?”

“Remember that lead in the sewers I told you about?” Marasi said. “Found a member of the Set there, augmented with Hemalurgy, heading up a gang of ruffians.”

“Fortunately,” Wayne said, “he didn’t have any use for the spike once Marasi was finished with him.”

“Technically, he *did* still have a use for it,” she said. “Which is why I had to remove it. Wax, he had four spikes. Isn’t that supposed to give Harmony control over a person?”

“Supposedly,” he said. That had been the whole issue with Lessie. Though the numbers varied by species, the principle was the same: spike yourself too many times, and Harmony could control you. It was an exploit to Hemalurgy that went back to the ancient days, when Ruin had directly controlled the Inquisitors, like Death himself.

But lately, Marasi had begun to encounter members of the Set with too many powers. Wax hadn’t believed at first, but if she’d confirmed it …

“The limitation has been circumvented somehow,” Wax said, inspecting the trellium spike. “Perhaps it has to do with the placement of this spike, as a linchpin?”

“Wax,” Marasi said, “this group was packing supplies for Bilming. Weapons and field rations.”

He shared a look with Steris. Rusts … the Outer Cities apparently thought war was inevitable. And with the vote today, it very well might be.

Still, to have another trellium spike after all these years … It reminded him of what had happened to Lessie, but he forced himself to hold it anyway. This wasn’t from her body. They didn’t know if her strange trellium spikes had influenced her madness. The kandra all said the spikes hadn’t been to blame, but something had turned her against Harmony, sent her down a paranoid path. Something had taken the woman he loved and turned her into Bleeder. He refused to accept that she’d been fully in control of herself.

Those old pains were dead and buried these days, so he was able to pick up the spike and inspect it. This metal was a manifestation—presumably—of the body of a god. Much like harmonium, also called ettmetal. What could he learn from this new sample?

The door swung open, revealing MeLaan wearing stylish blue trousers and a buttoned shirt. She'd been going for an androgynous look these days, with very short blonde hair and almost no hint of breasts. For her friends, she often maintained relatively similar features. This face, for example, looked like her—just thinner, less overtly feminine.

As usual she had picked a tall, limber body—this one was at least six foot four. She was toweling off her hair—she liked to wash it after putting on a new body, to better style it and make sure she'd got the grain right.

"Hey!" she said, seeing the spike in Wax's fingers. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Yup," Wayne said. "Marasi turned some bloke into hamburger to get it."

"Nice!" MeLaan said.

"I did *not* turn anyone into hamburger," Marasi said.

"She's more a fan of liver," Wayne said, and earned a glare.

"Speaking of meat," Wax said, "did you leave a meat bun in the pocket of my *mistcoat*?"

"Uh…" Wayne said. "It was … um…"

"You realize I'll have to get that thing laundered," Wax said. "And you're going to pay."

"Hey," Wayne said. "You don't got no proof I did that."

Wax gave him a flat stare.

"You can't convict me on a hunch," Wayne said, folding his arms. "I know my rights. Marasi's always quoting them to people once we finish beating them up. I get a trial by my peers, I do."

"Yes," Steris said, "but where would we find so many slugs on short notice?"

Wayne spun toward her, then—after just a brief pause—grinned widely. Those two were getting along better these days, which Wax enjoyed seeing.

For now, he kept inspecting the spike. What were its properties? Could it be melted? Could it …

He paused, then reached to his back pocket. There, nearly forgotten, was the envelope he'd found on his desk earlier. He opened it again and slid out the iron earring, a traditional accoutrement of the Pathian religion—and a means of communing with Harmony. Piercing your body with metal was a way to connect to God and give him some measure of influence over you.

He read the note again: *You'll need to make a second, once the proper metal arrives.*

Rusts. Why would Harmony tell him to make a second earring, presumably out of *Trell*'s metal?

There was no explanation in the envelope, of course. Harmony knew Wax far too well. A mystery was a better way to get his attention than an explanation.

Damn him.

He tucked that envelope away again. "Nice work," he said to Marasi. "*Very* nice work."

"Thank you," she said. "We should have a chance at some more members of the Set soon. I'm planning a sting."

She turned toward MeLaan, who was leaning against the wall, arms folded. For someone who spent her life in subterfuge—imitating others and doing missions for God himself—she certainly did like to stand out. Today she had left her cheeks faintly transparent to allow the emerald of her skeleton to show through.

"I could use your help, MeLaan," Marasi said. "I have a corpse that needs to get up and walk around—just long enough to trick the Set."

MeLaan grimaced. "I would love to, but … I've got a *thing*…"

"We could work around your schedule," Marasi said.

"That might be hard," MeLaan said. "Since it's kind of on another planet…"

"Another *planet*?" Marasi said.

"Well, maybe between planets?" MeLaan said. "I'm not entirely sure. Harmony wants some of us to strike out, begin exploring, learning about the cosmere. It’s become evident that the cosmere knows about *us*.” She nodded toward the spike pinched between Wax’s fingers.

“What’s it like?” Marasi asked MeLaan, with a certain … hunger in her eyes. “Traveling out there. How … do you even do it?”

“It’s difficult,” she said. “Both to get to the other side—which is an inversion of the real world—and to travel while there. I’ll be leaving soon, I’m afraid, but finding out what’s happening with the Set is a priority for Harmony. I’ll ask him to get you one of us to help on your mission, Marasi.”

Wax glanced at Wayne. MeLaan was leaving. Soon? He’d have to corner his friend and ask how he felt about that.

At that moment however, Allik burst through the door bearing a tray full of steaming pastries. “Aha!” he said, mask up to show off his grin. “A full room. Who wants cinnamon puffs with hot chocolate for dipping! You are obviously planning to save the world again, with those concerned faces. This is an action that requires much choc, yah?”

Wax smiled, enjoying Allik’s enthusiasm. He’d bounced back from the tragedy of losing so many friends to the Set years ago—tortured for information about airships. *People are elastic*, Wax thought. *We can keep reshaping ourselves. And if we’re not quite the same as before, well, that’s good. It means we can grow.*

Allik handed Marasi a mug of hot chocolate—almost comically large—with a wink. She took his hand and smiled, squeezing it. Four years of flirting and two years of formal dating, and those two still acted like schoolkids sometimes. Wax knew more about it than he really cared to, because Steris tended to take notes, then ask if she should be acting in equally ridiculous ways.

“There’s one other thing, Wax,” Marasi said. “I took a notebook from the Cycle I killed today. What do you make of this page?”

She handed it over and Wax settled back in his seat, Steris peeking over his shoulder as he read through dated entries in the notebook. “Looks like…” he said. “Annotated shipping records, into Elendel? ‘Box one yard square, stamped with foodstuff labels, inspected four out of six times.

Larger crate with warning labels, inspected and quarantined. Crate, two yards across, detained every time…'"

Steris frowned. "It looks like they're recording what gets inspected when shipped *into* the city."

"Which is odd, right?" Marasi said. "It's not hard to get shipments into Elendel. Only outgoing shipments are taxed for using our railway stations. That's the entire problem; the Outer Cities are tired of paying us to ship their goods to one another."

"Right," Wax said. "Why is the Set so interested in what they can get into the city?"

"Maybe they're planning to supply a rebel force inside it?" Steris said.

"But the whole point of their smuggling operation," Marasi said, "is to get weapons *out* of Elendel. They don't have *any* trouble giving weapons to the people inside Elendel."

They sat in silence, considering. Wax glanced at Steris, who shook her head. No thoughts at the moment. Finally, he returned the book to Marasi. As Allik continued distributing pastries, Wax went over to Wayne, who had uncharacteristically passed up a mug of chocolate. Allik handed it to Wax instead.

"Hey," Wax said to Wayne. "How much health do you have stored up? I might need your help with some experiments today."

"Sorry, mate," he said. "I gots an *appointment.*"

"You're not going to get into trouble, are you?"

"The reverse," Wayne proclaimed, then checked his pocket watch. Which was one of Wax's. "Actually, I gotta get moving. I don't wanna get shot for arriving late."

"A moment, Wayne?" MeLaan said.

"I really—" he began.

"It's important. Very important."

Wayne wilted, then nodded, his eyes sorrowful. Wax gripped his shoulder, as if to impart some strength. This had been coming. MeLaan was a wanderer.

Wayne and MeLaan left, and Wax tried to focus on the wonderful gift Marasi had brought him. A whole trellium spike.

“I,” he said, “am going to need my *goggles*.”

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12

Wayne sometimes pretended he was a hero. Some rusting old figure from the stories, off on some nonsense quest about slaying a monster or traveling to Death’s domain.

Lately it was hard to wear that hat. Especially when the truth stared him in the face every time he looked in a mirror. He’d made a whole career out of pretending. People just thought it was a talent. They never asked what he was hiding from.

Today, he’d have given almost anything to be someone else. MeLaan, wearing that fetching body—they were all fetching, honestly—led him through the entry hall to a small private sitting room on the other side. He made a swipe for his lucky hat, hanging on the wall outside the room, as they passed. But he missed it.

Inside, she sat him down in an overstuffed chair that made him feel like a child. Didn’t help that she was as tall as Wax was, in that body. Then she took his hand and crouched down, meeting his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Wayne,” she said softly. “I need to leave you. Today. It’s over. I tried to prepare you for this … but it was probably more painful to string it out, wasn’t it?”

“Dunno,” he said. “Never had my heart broke before. So I ain’t got no experience.”

She winced. “Wayne…”

“Sorry,” he said. “You gotta do your thing. I know that. A fellow doesn’t date an immortal agent of God himself without suspectin’ that one day he’ll take second place to the fellow what glows." Wayne frowned. "Does he glow?"

"I thought," she said, squeezing his hand, "that there would be fewer attachments with you."

"Where'd you get that idea?" he asked. "I get so attached, I wind up with all sorts of things what don't belong to me."

She grimaced.

"Was it … nothing to you, then?" he asked. "Six years?"

"It wasn't nothing," she said. "Just … not what it was to you. I know I should have expected that. TenSoon warned me, Ulaam warned me. Mortals see time differently. They *told* me. I'm sorry, Wayne."

"You ain't gotta apologize for somethin' you *don't* feel, MeLaan," Wayne said. "It ain't your fault."

It's mine.

"I … *asked* for this mission," she admitted. "Because I realized I was leading you on, and I knew the longer it went, the more painful it would be to break off. That's why I can't stay and help. I've got to go now. Before I lose my nerve."

"Would that … be so bad?"

"Yes," she said. "Because it's a lie, Wayne. I'd be staying because I didn't want to hurt you. Not because I actually wanted to stay."

He shouldn't want her to stay in those circumstances. But he did. Damn him, he did.

Still, he held his tongue. Sometimes you just had to stand there and get shot.

"It *is* an exciting mission," she said. "I get to cross the misted unknown, the dark vastness that Harmony calls 'Shadesmar.' I'll be the first kandra to go out there long-term, with an official mission.

"I get to explore the cosmere, Wayne. I get to go and see everything there is—worlds we can only *imagine*. I get to help those who need it—not one or two people, but entire *peoples*."

He nodded dully.

She stood, then leaned in to kiss him. He wanted to pull away, but … well, he would have regretted that. One long, last kiss, as could be delivered only by someone with a tongue that didn't confine itself to normal bounds of physiology.

"I did want to tell you something important," she whispered as she pulled away. "Something meaningful."

"Yeah?"

"You," she said, squeezing his hand one last time, "were a *really* good lay, Wayne."

"Really?"

"Really. To be honest, you were the best I've known."

"You're seven hundred years old," he said. "And *I* was the best?"

She nodded.

Well now, that was something. Something indeed.

"Thanks," he said. "That was sweet of you to tell me. It … helps."

"I thought it might," she said. "Goodbye, Wayne."

She let go of his hand and walked out. Knowing her, she'd send someone to box up the rest of her bodies. She'd picked the emerald today because it was one of her favorites—she'd probably take it and the aluminum one on her mission and leave the rest.

He sat staring at the door for a long time. He wasn't wearing a hat, which meant he had to just be himself. The true him, the one that knew this pain. They'd ridden together on many a dusty path. This pain had been his invisible friend since childhood.

The pain of knowing what he really was.

The pain of being worthless.

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13

Wax led the way down to the basement, feet thumping on steps behind him as he was followed by Steris and Marasi. While the upper floors of the mansion were dedicated to Steris's hobbies and the various needs of his friends, the basement belonged to Wax. And he'd made some modifications.

He'd begun pursuing metallurgy in the Roughs, where the mining towns often had equipment to test metal purities and the like. He'd been surprised at how useful the hobby had turned out to be. For example, few criminals realized you could track their suppliers by testing bullet casings.

In Elendel, he'd expanded his curiosity tenfold. A basement full of metal samples, acids and solvents, burners, microscopes, and even a room with a forge and an anvil. It all reminded him of the Roughs in a good way. Of Lessie laughing when he made a breakthrough. Of evenings spent folding metal like he was some ancient warrior making a knife meant to kill a god—rather than a novice trying to make a dining implement.

Lately, he'd found electrolysis and plating *fascinating,* and his new electricity-powered spectrometer was absolutely brilliant. Together with the graphs representing the spectroscopic colors of various elements, it let him identify practically anything. How would trellium react to that? Or to his acids, or to the magnets?

The questions energized him. It was a kind of excitement he'd lost during his middle years. It was too pure. He hadn't been able to feel excitement about something so simple and enriching at a time when his life had been falling apart.

He strapped on his goggles. Steris followed, putting on her own, then got out her clipboard. She handed him an apron, and he relented—he was wearing one of his nicer vests, though he'd tossed the cravat aside somewhere. Her own apron was more enveloping and thick, almost a flak jacket. He'd only recently persuaded her that maybe she didn't need two pairs of goggles at once; she could just order an extra-thick pair.

They set up at one of the tables, where Wax inserted the spike into a clamp to hold it steady.

Marasi stopped in the doorway, then grinned. "You two," she said, "are *adorable*."

Wax shared a look with Steris. "I don't believe I've been called adorable since I was Max's age."

"She should get her eyesight checked," Steris said. "Marasi, dear? I have goggles with corrective lenses, arranged in the drawers to your right."

"I'm fine," Marasi said, stepping in.

Steris clicked her tongue and pointed at the sign just above the doorway. GOGGLES REQUIRED. It had an asterisk and a scrawled handwritten note below—in crayon—that said, "'Cept Wayne."

"It's a good rule," Wax said. "You know how things happen around us."

"Things?" Marasi said, selecting a pair of goggles. "You mean explosions?"

"Not just explosions," Steris said. "Acid spills. Fires. Accidental weapon discharges. Though I suppose that one is technically a subset of explosion. How's the hardness?"

"Hard," Wax said as he tested the spike with various substances. "Scratched by diamond, but barely marks corundum. Just above a nine."

"Noted," she said.

"It's brittle too," Wax said, carefully chiseling. "Not like harmonium at all, which is nearly as pliable as gold. Would you get one of the burners going?"

Steris lit a gas nozzle. Wax got a chip of trellium off and brought it over in a tungsten alloy bowl, then set it under the flame and watched carefully.

The chip soon heated to white-hot, but did not liquefy.

“Melting point is extremely high,” he said. “Over twenty-five hundred degrees.”

“Similar to harmonium,” Steris said. “Try the electric melter?”

He nodded. The melter ran a powerful electric current through the metal in order to heat it beyond what the burner could manage. He’d had some luck with harmonium using this process. Unfortunately, although the little bit of trellium again turned white-hot, it wouldn’t even bend or stretch.

“Rusts,” Wax said softly, using tinted goggles to stare at the glowing bit of metal. “This stuff is *hard*.” How was he going to make an earring out of it?

Was he actually considering that? At the thought, he realized he didn’t know the envelope was from Him. Anyone could drop off something like that. He should talk to Harmony before doing anything foolish.

“TenSoon says that the metals are the bodies of divinities,” Steris said. “So-called God Metals were the source of the mists back in antever- dant days.”

“So why weren’t everyone’s lungs burned?” Wax said. “If I can heat this to over three thousand degrees without it liquefying, then it must be *extremely* hot when vaporized.”

“Perhaps,” Steris said, “these metals—unlike common ones—don’t change states based on temperature, but on other factors.”

Wax nodded in thought. Marasi leaned down beside the table, looking at the spike. “It’s full of power,” she said. “It’s a Hemalurgic spike, so it’s…”

“‘Invested’ is the term the kandra use,” Wax said. “It has taken a part of a person’s soul, through Hemalurgy, and stored it. Like a kind of … battery for life energy.”

Marasi shivered visibly. “It’s kind of like a corpse, then?”

“A murder weapon, at least,” Steris agreed, turning off the burner.

“Wax,” Marasi said, sounding reluctant, “when I was pulling this out of the Cycle, he started ranting. The way Miles did when he died.”

Wax looked up from his experiment. “What did he say?”

“He talked about men of gold and red,” Marasi said. “Like Miles. And then … he talked about starting the ashfalls again, as in the Catacendre.

Restoring the days of darkness and ash.”

“Impossible,” Wax said. “The land just isn’t set up that way anymore. The Ashmounts are either nonexistent or stilled. There isn’t the tectonic activity to cause another ashfall.”

“Are you sure?” Marasi asked.

He hesitated, then shook his head. “When Harmony showed me Trell’s influence enveloping our planet, even he seemed baffled. Our world, and our god, are basically three and a half centuries old. There are things out there that are far, *far* more ancient. Far, *far* more crafty.”

The lab fell silent, save for the *hum* of the electric current machine, which Wax flipped off.

“So we catch up,” Steris said, rapping her pencil against the clipboard. “What’s next?” Admittedly, *she* did look adorable in her oversized goggles and military-caliber vest over her tea gown. He also noticed his cravat sticking out of the pocket of her dress.

“Spectroscopy,” Wax said in response to her question. “Let’s burn some flakes.”

“Wait,” Marasi said. “You couldn’t get it to melt—how are you going to *burn* it?”

He took a file to the clamped spike, catching the shavings on a piece of thick cardstock. “Most metals will burn, Marasi, if you can get the pieces small enough and can apply enough oxygen. We’ve managed it with harmonium, even though we couldn’t melt it fully.”

“That’s … strange, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Indeed,” Wax said. “But we are, as has been noted, talking about the bodies of gods.”

He set up the spectroscope and managed to burn some flakes, using the oxygen line, to take some readings. Then he heated a piece again to get it to emit light waves and took readings on that. The machine made a pen move on a piece of paper, like a seismograph—only here, the highs and lows represented frequencies of light. Those patterns of light corresponded to different elements.

In this case, strangely, he got a straight-across line—a full spectrum. Though at the end of the spectrum, in the red, the machine tried to send the line higher than the maximum. Which shouldn't have been possible, for all that he'd seen it once before.

He unscrewed the pin holding the arm in place on the paper and reran the machine. Again a full spectrum at maximum—into the red, where the pin on the arm swung out and off the paper with a jerk.

Wax breathed out. "Seems proof it's a God Metal."

"Indeed," Steris said, scribbling notes in the darkness.

"Someone tell the dumb conner what's happening," Marasi said. "How is this proof of anything?"

"It's complicated," Wax said. "Each element has a kind of signature, represented by the wavelengths it releases when heated. It's basically a way to identify elements and compounds. Like using fingerprints to identify a person."

"And this metal," Steris said, "somehow projects a *full spectrum,* as if it were made of pure white light. But it also has something strange happening in the red, as if it has a light beyond what the machine can calculate or read."

"I've only seen something like this once before," Wax said.

"From harmonium?" Marasi guessed.

"Yes." He tapped the table, then shook his head. "In dealing with these metals, so many things seem to break the laws of physics. I feel like I'm experimenting with something dangerously beyond our understanding."

"Should we move to the safe box?" Steris asked.

"Probably wise," Wax said. "Particularly since the next step is to put some of these shavings into acids."

The "safe box" was Steris's name for the small reinforced box they'd built into the back wall. Three feet square and three feet deep, it was made out of aluminum and steel, with a large safe-like door on the front. That door had a small plate of very thick glass at the top, so you could look in. This contraption could take a grenade without trouble, and had handled an ettmetal-water explosion before.

Harmonium—ettmetal—was highly unstable. You needed to keep it in oil, as it tended to react even to the *air.* Since they couldn't know how trellium would respond to his acids, Wax set everything up inside the box, then latched it closed. From there, he could use some thin arms on gears inside to tip a little bit of trellium into each of the ten flasks of acid—and two flasks of a base.

Harmonium wasn't affected by acids, but maybe this metal would be. Anything to give him more of a foothold, help him understand. As he worked, Marasi walked over to the wall where Steris and he had pinned ideas, experiments, and thoughts regarding harmonium. Rusts … the oldest of those were over five years old now. Wax found it depressing to realize how little progress they'd made.

"All of this," Marasi said, reading the notes. "I don't think I've looked at it closely before … You're trying to split it." She spun toward him. "You've been trying to *divide* harmonium into its base metals? You're trying to create atium!"

He looked back into his viewer, continuing to dump flakes into the acid.

"Not just atium…" Marasi said. "Lerasium too? That's the metal that … It *created* Mistborn! It's explained in the records left by Harmony. Allomancy entered the world because the Lord Ruler gave lerasium to some of his followers, who burned it and were changed. Those first mythical Mistborn—they held incredible power. You're trying to replicate that."

"No," Wax said. "I'm trying to see if it *can be* replicated."

"All these years," Marasi said, "and you never told me why you kept needing ettmetal? I thought you were trying to figure out how to make airships, like everyone else!"

"We've barely made any progress," Wax said, finishing with the acids and turning away from the safe box. "But Marasi, don't you see? The Set is devoted to restoring the ancient powers to people—they'll use eugenics, Hemalurgy, *anything.* So if it's possible to make lerasium again, *we* need to know about it."

"You still could have told me," she said.

"I wanted to have something useful to show first," Wax said. He walked over to join her, passing Steris, who was fiddling with the trellium spike. Beside Marasi, he looked up at the wall of pinned ideas again. Remembered how thrilling it had been when first working on harmonium.

Getting some trellium to play with had awakened that again. But now, staring at this board, he remembered the rest of the experience. The slow, steady realization that he wasn't going to crack this particular puzzle. He'd worked on enough hopeless cases to realize when one was growing cold.

He was a hobbyist, not an expert. He'd shared his notes with the people at the university, and they'd thanked him—but had plainly already made the same observations. If a breakthrough with ettmetal was going to happen, it would come from those dedicated scientists working to build Elendel its own airships, Allomantic grenades, and Feruchemical medallions.

He would probably have to turn the trellium spike over to them. He'd have his fun for a few days, but this was too important to keep from the real experts.

"Waxillium?" Steris said from behind. "You should come look at this."

"What?" he asked, turning.

"The trellium spike," she said, "is *reacting* to the harmonium."

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14

Wayne ducked into the alley just in time. Those two fellows with the bowler hats passed by on the sidewalk a moment later. Wayne crouched there, heart pounding, and counted to a hundred before letting himself relax. Close call.

He'd mostly recovered from the meeting with MeLaan. In fact, he figured he'd handled it quite well. No*thing* was broken, no*body* was broken but him, and he'd only needed three shots of whiskey to get moving after. Plus, he'd realized what his day was going to be.

It was a rusting funeral.

You could take quests and flush them away. He was having a funeral today, and that was that. He had worn his nice jacket and a matching hat, all fancy and proper. He even had a flower in the lapel, which he'd *paid* for. With actual money. Fancy is as fancy does.

He rejoined the procession on the street outside. Yes, they all seemed to know it was a funeral day, they did. So many heads down rather than looking up at the sun. So many dull faces, like they were the dead, still up and moving because … well, in the city, there were jobs to do.

Did dead people think funerals were celebrations? Initiation parties? Reverse birthdays?

He kept his head down, acting like a member of the masses on the sidewalk. This city, it just had so many people. Floods of them on the streets in this part of the octant, the financial district, all in their funeral finest. It should have been easy for anyone to fit in since there was basically every sort of person you might want to meet. But somehow the financial district mashed people up into a similar ball of cravats and heels. You could almost not notice that some were Terris and others were koloss-blooded.

Hard to miss that rusting airship dominating the sky, but keeping your head down helped. Maybe today's funeral was for the city itself. Or at least its naiveté.

The Drunken Spur was on Feder Way, right on the corner of Seventy-Third. You couldn't miss it, what with the swinging wooden sign outside and the mannequins in Roughs gear in the window. Not a lot of upscale cafés used mannequins, but this place was special. Kind of like how a kid who ate mud was special. But Jaxy liked it, so one made accommodations. Wayne was an accommodating kind of person, he was.

He stepped inside and tried not to cringe *too* hard at what the serving staff was wearing. Roughs hats. Bright red shirts. Chaps? Oh, Ruin. He was going to gag. At least the greeter at the host's stand was in a proper suit.

"Your hat, sir?" the man said, and Wayne handed it over, then swiped the bell off the stand.

"Um, sir?" the greeter asked, looking at the bell.

"You'll get it back when you return my hat," Wayne said. "A man gots to have insurance."

"Uh…"

"Where's my table? It's got two pretty women at it, and one of them's nice, but the other probably threatened to shoot you when she was bein' seated."

The host pointed. Ah, there they were. Wayne nodded and stalked that direction. Rusting terrible attire for them to all wear on a day like this. You didn't go to a funeral in chaps unless you rode there on a horse. Or unless you were old Three-Tooth Dag, who liked that sort of thing.

Ranette was Ranette: curvaceous—though he wasn't supposed to talk about it—and wearing slacks. Jaxy was in a fine white dress, with short white-blonde hair in very tight curls, accented by diamond barrettes. She liked sparkles. He didn't blame her. Far too few sparkles in life. Adults was supposed to be able to wear what they wanted, so why did so few choose sparkles?

He sat down with Ranette and Jaxy, then thumped his forehead down on the table, making the silverware rattle.

“Oh, delightful,” Ranette said in a dry voice. “Drama.”

“Wayne?” Jaxy asked. “You all right?”

“Mumble mumble,” he said into the tablecloth. “Mumble.”

“Don’t humor him,” Ranette said.

“Yes, humor him,” Wayne grumbled. “He needs it right now.”

“What happened?” Jaxy asked.

“I am officially dumped,” he said. “And my whiskey is wearing off. Stupid body. Metabolizing and neutralizing poisons as if I didn’t dump ’em in there on purpose.” He looked up. “You think I could cut out my liver and stay drunk forever?”

“I’ll humor him on *that* one,” Ranette said.

“I’m sorry, Wayne,” Jaxy said, patting him on the hand.

“’S all right,” he said. “At least you dressed up fer the funeral.”

“The…?” Jaxy asked.

“Ignore him,” Ranette said. But then she softened her voice. “Hey. You’ll live, Wayne. I’ve seen you get through worse.”

“When?”

“That one time you *literally* got a cannonball through the stomach.”

He looked up. “Oh yeah. That was something else.”

Jaxy had gone pale. “Did it hurt?”

“Not as much as you’d think,” he said. “Like, yeah, I got torn in half. But I think my body was just kinda confused, you know? Not every day you’re in two pieces.”

“Fortunately,” Ranette said, “his metalminds were on the piece with his head. Otherwise…”

He forced himself to sit up, then sighed and put the bell on the table, then rang it. Then rang it again. Seriously, what was the point of these things if people didn’t pay attention? The third ring finally got a server to step over.

“Vodka,” Wayne said to her. “Worst you got. Closer to piss it tastes, the better.”

“Wayne,” Ranette said, “this is an upscale restaurant.”

“Right,” he said. “Putta olive in it or somethin’.”

“Was that even our server?” Jaxy asked as the woman moved off.

“I try not to look too closely,” Ranette said. “Given the awful outfits.”

“I hear you,” Wayne said. “Who thought a Roughs-themed restaurant was a good idea? Like, to be authentic you’d have to have only stew on the menu. Then when people ordered it, you’d be out of stew and just give them beans.”

“I like it,” Jaxy said. “It’s amusing.”

“It’s insulting,” Ranette said.

“Can we talk more about me?” Wayne said. “Because I’m still over here feeling like what’s left of the grapes after the wine’s been made.”

“Poor dear,” Jaxy said.

“You’re too good to him, Jax,” Ranette said.

“He’s one of your oldest friends.”

“Only because he can’t die.”

“Ranette…” Jaxy said.

“Fine,” Ranette said, then put her hand on Wayne’s shoulder. “You’re strong, Wayne. You can get through this.” She took the glass from the tray when the server came back, and handed it to him. “Look, here’s your alcohol.”

“Thanks, Ranette,” he said, accepting it. “You really know how to make a fellow feel better.”

“To be honest,” she said, “I’m proud of you, Wayne. How you’re handling this. It’s relatively mature.”

“This is mature?” he asked, then downed the vodka.

“*Relatively.*”

“Suppose you gotta be an adult to get booze,” Wayne admitted. “But … it’s just…” He sighed and sat back. “I didn’t think I’d ever meet someone who understood what it was like to have to be another person most of the time. And she did. She *did*, Ranette.”

“You’ll … uh, find someone else?” Ranette said. “Someone better? That’s what I’m supposed to say, right? Even if it’s probably not true, since I doubt there are many people who are better than a Faceless Immortal. And —”

“Oh, Ranette,” Jaxy said, shaking her head.

“What?” she said. “I don’t *do* comforting, all right?”

“Wayne,” Jaxy said, “it will hurt. That’s okay. Pain is just your body and your mind acknowledging that this is awful.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled. “You’re a good friend, Jaxy. Even if you have terrible taste in women.”

“Hey!” Ranette said. “*You* chased me for the better part of fifteen years.”

“Yeah? And how’s my taste, on average?”

“I…” Ranette said. “Damn. Stop aiming for the vital bits, Wayne. This is supposed to be a friendly meal.”

“Sorry,” he said, then put his elbows on the table, holding his head in his hands. They still hadn’t seen their actual server, which made sense. This was a seriously fancy place; you could tell by their contempt for their customers.

“I meant it though, about being proud of you,” Ranette told him. “You’ve grown, Wayne. A lot. We’ve been going to dinner for years now, and you haven’t hit on me once.”

“I promised. Besides, you’re taken. I ain’t a poacher.” He slumped back in his seat. “This wouldn’t be so bad if *that* day weren’t coming up.”

“The day…” Ranette said. “When you have to deliver payment to that girl?”

Wayne nodded. “Allriandre,” he said. “She and her sisters don’t have a daddy because of me.” His day of trials was the worst day of the month, where he had to go face her. And admit what he’d done: murdering her daddy over twenty years ago.

You know you aren’t forgiven.

I know.

You will never be forgiven.

I … I know.

Ranette leaned forward, tapping on the saltshaker with her fingernail. It was in the shape of a Roughs-style boot. So fancy that the awful decor somehow wrapped around to being tasteful.

“What if,” Ranette said to him, “you *didn’t* see her this month?”

“I’ve gotta,” Wayne said.

“Why?”

“It’s my punishment.”

“Says who?”

“The cosmere,” Wayne said. “I took her daddy from her, Ranette. I gotta remember. What I am. I gotta look her in the eyes and let her know I ain’t forgotten.”

The two women shared a look.

“Wayne,” Jaxy said, “I’ve … wanted to talk to you about that. The way you treat that girl. I realize today might not be the best day…”

“Nah,” he said. “Hit me, Jaxy. I’m mostly numb already. It’s a good day to get punched.”

“Why do you insist,” Jaxy said, “on seeing her in person?”

“So she can punish me.”

“Does she *want* to punish you?”

“She seems to enjoy it when it happens.”

“Does she? Does she *really,* Wayne? Because the way you tell it, sounds like she asks you *not* to come see her.”

“Because she’s bein’ too nice,” Wayne explained. “But I don’t deserve anyone bein’ nice to me.”

“I told you, Jax,” Ranette said. “He’s got the self-awareness of a half-eaten sandwich.”

Wayne frowned. What was she on about?

“I’ve never met anyone,” Jaxy said, “who can get inside the heads of other people as well as Wayne can. He’ll understand.”

“He gets in their heads when it suits him,” Ranette said. “Not when it means seeing things he doesn’t want to see.”

Wayne looked away. Ranette said a lot of mean things, but they weren’t … well, they weren’t *actually* mean. He joked, and she joked. And sure, sometimes there was an edge of truth to it, but that’s what friends was about. Making you look a little silly when you were together, so that you didn’t look *really* stupid when you were apart.

But the way she said that last bit … it stung. He understood people, didn’t he? Wax and Marasi, they were great at the investigating part. But they needed someone like Wayne who really *knew* the people who lived in the dirt—and counted themselves lucky, because at least it wasn't mud. Currently.

"Wayne," Jaxy said, "what do you imagine that girl wants? Can you think like her? Does she *really* want you to come remind her of her pain each month?"

"I … I want her to be happy. And beating up a fellow like me who made her unhappy … well, that's the best way."

"Is it?" Jaxy asked softly. "Or is it about you? Doing some kind of penance? Wayne, each time you ignore what that girl asks of you, you take a little joy from her and turn it into your own suffering."

He squeezed his eyes shut.

"You *can* see it," Jaxy said, patting his hand. "I know you can."

"I've lost my appetite," he said, shoving back from the table and stalking off through the restaurant.

From behind, Ranette's voice chased him. "I told you. He might not be as bad as I pretend, Jax. But he's not as good as you want to pretend either."

He traded the bell for his hat back, and only took one of the fellow's cufflinks in the exchange—a fair trade for them keeping his hat over some stupid bell that barely even worked. Outside, unfortunately, he all but collided with two men in bowler hats and vests.

Rust and Ruin! They'd found him.

"Sir," the taller of the two bean counters said, "we need to talk about your finances."

"Whataboutem?" Wayne said, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"You have *far* too much money," the shorter one said. "Please, sir. We *have* to talk about your investment strategy! Your current lack of diversification is a *crime*."

Well, to ashes with him, then. This day had actually found a way to get worse. He let them shove him into their hearse of a car, off to the mortuary. Or, well, the accounting firm that kept track of his wealth. Same difference.

In either case Wayne, as everybody knew him, was dead.

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The trellium was moving.

Steris had been getting out a harmonium sample for study in conjunction with the trellium spike. And the trellium did *not* seem to like it.

Wax moved the small bead of harmonium—suspended in a vial of oil—toward the trellium. It again rolled away.

“Curious,” Wax said. Then, on a hunch, he burned a little steel inside of him.

The trellium spike rolled away from him again. “I didn’t Push,” he said. “It responded to me *burning* steel.”

“That’s a result!” Steris said, scribbling furiously. “Wax, that’s actually *useful*.”

And … yes, it was, wasn’t it? A way to test if someone was burning their metals? Seekers could do that, but having a mechanical way to accomplish it …

“Oh!” Marasi said. “I should have mentioned. That spike had a similar reaction to the other spikes I harvested.”

“It’s like Allomancy,” Steris said. “Like the trellium spike is *using* Allomancy to Push.”

“No,” Wax said. “It’s more like magnetism. The trellium spike responds to other sources of Investiture in the way one magnet responds to another one.”

“It wants to stay apart from them,” Steris said.

“More like it has the same charge,” Wax said. “I doubt that it ‘wants’ anything.” Though, as this was part of a god, who knew? Particularly since, so far as he was aware, other Invested items with a similar charge didn’t repel one another.

A little experimenting showed him that the two metals—harmonium and trellium—repelled each other with increasing strength the more he tried to push them together. Again, like magnets. The response to harmonium was stronger than the response to him burning his metals.

Wax consulted a large chart on the wall; it displayed an extrapolation from a notebook that Death had given Marasi. Once upon a time, that event had been one of the most surreal Wax had ever heard described. These days it seemed almost commonplace.

The book detailed how to use Hemalurgy. He’d studied the notes in depth, and had created a chart of all the points on the body where spikes could be placed. A detailed list of the ways they worked, requiring linchpin spikes to coordinate and keep the network functioning.

The Set was experimenting further with Hemalurgy. And his sister, Telsin, was out there somewhere, high up in the leadership of the Set. Seven years ago, he’d thought she’d been kidnapped … but he should have seen. Telsin’s incredible ambition fit perfectly with the Set’s goals.

It had led her to spiking herself. Pinning pieces of souls to her own. It nauseated him to think of the people murdered for that purpose—to realize what Telsin and the Set were doing. In his fingers, he held not only a relic from a long-forgotten god; he held a tattered symbol of his sister’s rejected humanity.

Rusts. He really was going to have to talk to Harmony, wasn’t he? As little as Wax liked it, he was a part of this. He needed to finish what he’d begun all those years ago, when he’d fled Elendel—leaving his house to the machinations of his sister and uncle.

Footsteps on the stairs announced Allik, arriving with refreshments. Wax wasn’t certain if the former airman did that so assiduously because he thought of this mansion as his home and wanted to entertain, or if he just enjoyed having people around to try his baking. Nevertheless, the sight of him—mask up, grinning widely and bearing two plates of chocolate biscuits—did lighten Wax's mood.

"You are being careful," Allik said to Wax, "never to put too much ettmetal in one place, yah?"

"I don't think I have enough to worry about."

"Still, always good to remember," Allik said. "One of the basic rules of handling it."

They had all kinds of odd rules about the metal, and Wax had trouble separating the superstitions from the science. Supposedly, you couldn't put a large concentration of ettmetal in one place, otherwise it caused strange reactions—though Allik didn't know specifics.

The perky Southerner marched up to Marasi with his offerings and held them out.

"Oh!" Marasi said, snatching a biscuit. "My favorite."

Wax took one too. He was accustomed to biscuits that could block a bullet in a pinch. It was the Basin way. Yet these were moist, even gooey. It was odd, but not unwelcome.

Marasi in particular seemed to be infatuated by the way Allik put sweetened chocolate in everything. "They're best when warm," she said, munching as Allik sat across from her. Wax *had* wiped off that lab table, hadn't he? "You know, you look more handsome when I'm eating choc. How curious."

"You just say that," Allik replied, "because you want me to make more."

"Of *course* that's why I say it," she replied, seizing a second biscuit.

Wax sat back on his stool, enjoying his biscuit, thinking about the metals laid out on the table in front of him. Harmonium and trellium. They repelled each other. More and more violently, the closer together they were …

I wonder …

He gathered up the materials and was setting up a new experiment in the safe box as another set of footsteps started down the steps. This made them all pause. Wax carefully slipped some bullets from his pouch, ready to Push them. Though when the door opened, it revealed a prim man in a brown suit. He had stark blond hair—perfectly styled—and spectacles with wire frames. The type of person whose entire bearing screamed, “I fact-check people’s jokes.”

“VenDell?” Wax guessed, putting his bullets away. The kandra was wearing a new body, but the creature’s air was distinctive.

“Indeed, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said, entering the room and undoing his satchel. “You’ll forgive me for letting myself in.” He set a piece of paper on the table beside Marasi. “This is for you, Miss Colms.”

“What is it?” she asked, wiping her fingers on a napkin that Steris materialized as if from nowhere.

“A note recovered from the site of your engagement with the Set,” VenDell said. “LeeMar recovered it before the other investigating constables could notice it.”

“Wait,” Marasi said. “You have kandra among the constables I don’t know about?”

“Several,” VenDell said.

“Who?”

“Cassileux, for one. LeeMar took over her life about sixteen months ago, after the real woman died in that raid on the Nomad Gang.”

Marasi’s jaw dropped. “But … Cassileux and I had *lunch* last week!”

“Yes, she keeps an eye on you,” VenDell said.

“She didn’t tell me!”

“Should she have?” he asked absently, then sniffed at the biscuits that Allik offered him. “How horrible.”

“Aw,” Allik said, his shoulders slumping.

“I’ve told you, Master Allik,” VenDell said. “I am a carrion feeder, and strictly carnivorous. These … creations … would not suit me. But if you are interested, I’ve been considering putting up good money for one of your masks.”

“What?” Allik said, hand going to his mask, which was still up on the top of his head. “My mask?”

“There has been discussion among the kandra lately,” he said, “about your masks. Many of us think they are as integral to your natures as hair or nails—virtually a part of your skeleton. As such, I have decided to start collecting them for future bodies. Do you have any for sale?”

“Uh…” Allik said. “You’re an odd man, yah?”

“I’m not a man at all,” VenDell said. “I’ll leave you with an offer; let me know if you’d entertain some negotiations. I would only require the mask after your death, of course. If you persist in spending time with this group of people, that might not be far off.”

He walked toward Wax next, then held out his hand. “May I see it, please?”

Wax sighed, then turned to the safe box where he’d been setting up his experiment. He took out the trellium spike and presented it to VenDell, who held it up toward the light.

“I thought you couldn’t touch those,” Steris said from the table beside Marasi.

“You are mistaken, Lady Ladrian,” VenDell said. “This is not a kandra’s spike, so touching it is not taboo.”

“I’m not going to let you take this one,” Wax warned. “It needs to be studied.”

“Unfortunately,” VenDell said, “I have no intention of recovering it, so we won’t get to see if you could actually prevent me or not.”

“You don’t want it,” Wax said, “because it’s not a kandra spike? Unlike the ones that belonged to Lessie, which you stole from us.”

“You gave those up willingly.”

“I was not in an emotional state to do anything willingly,” Wax said. “I still want to know how much that metal—trellium—had to do with what happened to her.”

“The way Paalm … acted was a direct result of her decision to remove one of her spikes,” VenDell said. “The trellium spikes may have exacerbated her ailment, but were not the root cause.”

“Harmony implied otherwise to me.”

VenDell turned the spike over in his fingers and didn’t reply. Instead he nodded toward the safe box. “What are you doing here?”

“Electric current to soften some harmonium,” Wax said, pointing at the equipment he’d set up: a system to deliver a powerful current through a tiny nugget of harmonium held at the center, coated in oil to prevent it from corroding. “That’s the closest we ever came to dividing it.”

“It cannot be divided,” VenDell said. “Not so long as Harmony remains Harmony. I’ve explained this.”

Steris trailed over with her clipboard, and they shared a look. It was true; harmonium wasn’t actually an alloy. Yet Harmony held both Ruin and Preservation—so somehow this metal was both atium and lerasium, blended in a way that defied ordinary scientific explanation.

It seemed reasonable there would be a way to split it. Yet, acids for selective dissolution had failed. Different heating methods to get the components to self-separate while fluid had failed. Electrolysis had failed.

A dozen other ideas had failed as well. There was a reason he’d lost momentum on the project. But of all they’d tried, electric currents seemed to have come the closest. He activated the machine, and didn’t bother closing the front of the safe box. He’d run this experiment often enough that he was comfortable doing it in the open.

The tiny bit of harmonium heated up. Marasi and Allik walked over, watching it glow with a powerful internal light. Then Wax activated the other component of the machine—which pulled the nugget apart.

Harmonium was pliable, more so when heated. When softened like this, it seemed to react differently to the air—no longer as volatile. As if … as if it were becoming something else.

This specialized machine continued to deliver electric current through the grips at the sides—but now those moved apart and *stretched* the metal. If he continued, he could divide it cleanly, making two pieces of harmonium. That itself wasn’t remarkable. But the machine was set to pull only a few sixteenths of an inch, then stop. The result was two globs of harmonium at the sides, with a narrower stringy bit between.

“What is this supposed to do?” VenDell asked.

“Watch,” Wax said. With his tinted goggles, it was probably easier to see—but after a few moments the metals started to *rearrange*. The glob of harmonium on the left side began to glow a blue-white. The one on the right adopted a stranger air, growing silvery and reflective. It *almost* seemed liquid, like mercury—the surface incredibly smooth.

“Is that…?” Marasi asked.

“No,” Wax said. “If you cut it in half right now, when the metals cool you’ll just have two bits of harmonium. Yet in this state, the metals *almost* separate. You can see the left bit taking on aspects of lerasium. The bead on the right … that’s how atium was described.”

“It always looks like it *wants* to divide,” Steris said. “That it’s arranging itself to do so.”

“Ruin and Preservation,” Marasi whispered. “Atium and lerasium.”

“I think that’s the reason harmonium is so unstable,” Wax explained. “Harmony has trouble acting, right? He’s mentioned it before: his two aspects work against one another, leaving him indecisive, impotent.”

“He’s merely in equilibrium,” VenDell said. “Equal parts the need to protect and the need to let things decay.”

“Well,” Wax said, “I’m increasingly certain we face a god who *isn’t* hindered by that kind of equilibrium. I was skeptical at first, but Marasi convinced me.”

“Trell is dangerous, VenDell,” Marasi said, squinting against the bright light. “We have to do something. We can’t wait for Harmony.”

“Almost I am persuaded,” VenDell said. “What did you think of the note?”

“It’s confusing,” Marasi said. “And vague.”

Wax shot her a glance.

“I’ll explain,” she promised. “But first … are we going further with this?” She nodded toward the safe box they were all crowded around.

“Well,” Wax said, taking the trellium spike back from VenDell, “we noticed that this metal repels all forms of Investiture—and it repels harmonium even harder. I thought … what if I stretched a nugget apart like this, then used trellium to try to split it? Might that repel the two sides harder, and actually separate out some atium and lerasium?”

He looked to the others in turn.

“What … are the chances that blows things up?” Allik asked.

“Considering harmonium is involved?” Steris said. “I’d say it’s *incredibly* likely. But worth a try.”

“That’s why we have the safe box, right?” Wax said. “Plus, that’s a very small bit of harmonium. How much energy could one piece of metal contain?"

The words hung in the air.

"So…" Allik said. "I think we should all go next door and be very far away when he does this, yah?"

"Yah," Marasi agreed.

Wax took a deep breath, then nodded. "I'll rig a timer," he said. "This basement is reinforced with enough concrete to pave a highway, so we should be fine upstairs."

"We could make the kandra do it," Marasi said. "They're basically indestructible."

"Basically," VenDell said, "is infinitely distant from 'completely,' Miss Colms. I have been instructed to help you with your little infiltration—I believe you have a corpse for me?—not to risk my life trying to accomplish the impossible."

"Timer it is," Wax said.

"I'll get a tiny sliver of trellium," Steris said, "so we don't have to use the entire spike."

"Good idea," Wax said. He should be able to repurpose his hydraulic punch …

It took a good half hour to set the whole thing up. All the while, Wax wondered. What if he *did* split harmonium? He'd have two metals, the bodies of gods, each capable of incredible things from ancient lore, like manipulating time or creating beings with mythological Mistborn abilities. What if he had that power? What would that change about him?

Nothing, he thought to himself. *I've held that power. And when I had it, I used it to save my friends.*

He finished the calibrations, leaving a machine on a timer set for five minutes. Once the time was up, it would press the tiny trellium shard forward into the center of the heated and stretched harmonium bead.

He closed the safe box tight, and together they all fled up the stairs and secured the thick metal door at the top. And then … Wax realized five minutes had probably been excessive.

"So…" he said as he pulled out his watch, "what about that note?"

"It was in one of the boxes in the cavern," VenDell explained. "One of the few that weren't destroyed in the explosions."

"During the mission earlier," Marasi said, "I spotted a masked figure in dark clothing. I had a slowness bubble up at the time, and she approached as a blur. I got barely a glance at her before she left, but I think this must be from her."

She turned the paper toward Wax, showing a simple message.

We are watching, Marasi, it read. *And we are impressed.*

It had a small symbol at the bottom, with three interlocking diamonds. It looked vaguely familiar to Wax, though he didn't think he'd ever seen the symbol before. More, the pattern reminded him of something.

"You ever seen this?" Wax asked VenDell.

"Uh…" he said, "that is a question I'm forbidden to answer. My apologies, Lord Ladrian."

"Forbidden?" Steris asked. "By whom?"

"Harmony himself, Lady Ladrian," VenDell said. For the first time that Wax could remember, the creature looked *uncomfortable.* "I suggest you speak to him directly."

"Great," Marasi said. "Nice to know we're working for the defense of the *planet itself* while God is acting like a child with a secret crush."

"False gods are like that," Allik said, and earned glares from all around the room. He just shrugged.

They all fell silent. *Why,* Wax thought, *does a few minutes feel like forever when you're waiting?*

"So," VenDell said. "Your bones, Lord Ladrian. Have you reconsidered—"

"Not for sale."

"But—"

"Not for sale."

"Ah well, then," VenDell said. "Can't blame a person for inquiring. Such a fine skeleton, and for it to go to waste…"

A sudden *blast* shook the entire building. Chandeliers rattled, the window to Wax's right cracked, and he heard dishes fall somewhere in the kitchen.

“Rusts,” Marasi said. “They probably felt that in the next octant over. You … think the safe box held?”

“One way to find out,” Wax said, walking toward the door to the basement.

“At least,” Allik said to the others, “we planned for it this time, yah?”

“*Always* plan for an explosion around Wax,” Steris said. “It saves a ton of effort.”

Wax pulled the door open, then started down the steps.

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Call and Son and Daughters Accounting and Estate might not have *looked* like a mortuary, but Wayne was absolutely certain it was one. Because you'd have to be dead to enjoy working in such a place.

Tall Boring Guy and Short Boring Guy sat him down and started embalming him right away. Not with the good stuff either. He'd have taken basically any kind of drink, but no, they had to use ink.

They dried his body out good first though.

"Your investments," Tall Boring Guy said, "are too high-risk, Master Wayne. We recommend a more balanced portfolio."

"How much money have I got?" he asked, sullen.

"Over twenty million at this point."

Well, damn. "I told you," he said, "to give it to people what don't have any houses!"

"Yes, and your affordable housing project was wildly successful," Short Boring Guy said, perking up and reaching for a ledger. "How you anticipated the impending subsidies is quite a stroke of—"

"And that girl?" Wayne said. "With the plugs in the walls?"

Tall Boring Guy smiled. "The revolutionary electric devices developed by Miss Tarcsel are at the forefront of your financial empire, Master Wayne! Profits are *astronomical.*"

"Your real estate investments were wise," Short Boring Guy said, "but we need to liquidate some of your ownership in Tarcsel Electric and invest in other, newer companies, to provide a buffer against competition—which is beginning to pop up now that the initial patents are lapsing."

"You guys," Wayne said, "really need to get girlfriends or somethin'."

"Oh, we both are dating, Master Wayne," Short Boring Guy said. "Garisel is quite popular, I must say. And you have no idea how wild lady accountants can be! Why, the other night—"

"Shut it," Wayne grumbled. "Don't rub it in." Well, no use resisting. A man couldn't run from his own funeral. Mostly because his legs don't work when he's dead. "Fine. Give me one of those damn hats."

They looked at one another, but Wayne waved impatiently, so Tall Boring Guy finally took his bowler from the peg by the door and handed it over.

Wayne pulled it on, and his death was right and truly accomplished. Rust him all the way down to the bones. He eyed the ledgers, rubbing his thumb against the bottom of his chin. But that wasn't enough, so he absently took Short Boring Guy's spectacles from the man's vest pocket, then tucked them into his own pocket.

Still not enough. "Kindly fetch me," he said, "some honey tea with some lemon on the side and one tiny sprig of mint. Not too much, mind you, but enough to add some perk. You understand, don't you, Garisel? Good man, good man."

Soon he had it in hand while he surveyed the ledgers. They gave his last name as "Terrisborn," since he had no proper family name. He kept reading.

Yes, yes. Numbers. That was plenty of numbers, all right. Of the high sort, which accountants like him liked to see. Hardly any red to the ledger. Yes, hmm. Not enough honey in this tea.

There was no denying what the ledgers said. Wayne *was* dead. And in his place lived a fellow who was fancy. No, who was downright *opulent.*

"You at least," he said, "have my bendalloy?"

An aide fetched an enormous sack of it. Enough to buy two or three cars, if he'd wanted.

"Right, then," Wayne said. "Here's what we're going to do. You see this here?" He unfolded something from his inside pocket—a flyer recruiting boys for a local noseball league. "We shall give these chaps funding for equipment and will build for them a location in which to enjoy their engagements.”

“Sir?” Short Boring Guy asked. “Why?”

“We’ll include seating,” Wayne explained, “and allow everyone to watch. See, right now everyone wants someone to yell at. And we, my friends, shall provide it for them. We shall create a large-scale noseball league, with a team from each octant. I’ve thought, gentlemen, for some time that the city needs a way to become drunken in a proper and controlled manner.”

“I don’t understand, sir,” Tall Boring Guy said.

“A bar exists for a reason,” Wayne said. “It is a controlled environment in which to drink. People are going to seek to partake in spirits, you see, and it is better for society that we plan for this.

“Currently, the octants are tense. The people are angry. The Outer Cities, why, they are riotous! We must allow *rage* to be experienced in a similar way to drunkenness—with a controlled outlet, with someone for everyone to dislike.”

They looked at him blankly.

“We’re gonna get a bunch of chaps to beat on one another,” Wayne said in a lower-class accent. “Playin’ for teams representin’ the octants, so everyone can pick their favorite and hate all the other teams. In a right proper way.”

“Ah!” Short Boring Guy said.

People these days, and their lowborn vernacular. Why, he suspected this pair didn’t even know how to properly burnish a golden toilet! For fear!

“Yes…” Tall Boring Guy said. “I see. So, like the local clubs, but on a *citywide* scale.”

“People love their local teams,” Wayne explained. “We can do something good with that.”

“Building arenas of the proper size will be expensive,” Short Boring Guy said. “Even for you.”

“We could charge people a bit to get in the door, then,” Wayne said. “Everyone enjoys something more when they have a monetary stake in it.”

“Yes…” Tall Boring Guy said. “Yes, this is *interesting*. Monetization of the rivalries—and the personal coding of interest—will be a seminal part of this activity…”

“That *is* my favorite part of *most* activities,” Wayne noted.

Tall Boring Guy nodded. “This is excellent. We shall put our best people on it.”

“Nah,” Wayne said, “put your worst ones on it. They’ll know more about loafing—the rapscallions—which shall serve me better in this particular situation. Now, let us discuss the beating of servants and how it’s not really so bad for them.”

Rusts, this hat. He pulled it off and wiped his brow. Stupid money and stupid rich hats. This one even had aluminum foil on the inside to protect from emotional Allomancy.

Well, surely *this* idea with the noseball would finally bankrupt him. It was, after all, his very worst idea—and he was an absolute idiot. He spun the hat on his finger and thought about it. What if Wax—or worse, *Marasi*—figured out he was rich? He’d never hear the rusting end of it.

Tall Boring Guy tugged at his collar. “Do you … actually want us to investigate using more corporal punishment on, um, some of your staff?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “Bein’ in the army stinks.”

“Sir,” Short Boring Guy said, “what about the provisions in your trust? We’d like to talk about the more unusual ones you’ve made.”

“Nope. Next.”

“Your current housing situation—”

“Nope. Next.”

“Have you yet confirmed with Waxillium that he understands he signed away likeness rights to you in that deal—”

“Nope. Next.”

“Your fleet of cars?”

Those he liked. “What about them?”

“There’s a new Victori,” Short Boring Guy said, getting out a picture of it. It had *no top*. Like, so you could drive and spit into the wind, if you wanted.

“Damn, that’s nice,” Wayne said. “Get me one.”

“Absolutely, sir,” Short Boring Guy said. “How many shares in the company shall we buy?”

Wayne narrowed his eyes at him. “I see what you’re doing.”

They looked at him innocently.

“No more than a five percent stake,” Wayne said, “and once these guys what play noseball get famous, have them drive the cars around so they get more popular and whatnot. Oh, and let’s call it something other than noseball. Maybe change the long runner positions to let those two be Metalborn. Same with the goalie. That’ll make things more interesting.”

“As you wish, Master Wayne.”

He spun the hat on his finger. *I’ve never met anyone who can get inside the heads of other people as well as Wayne can.* He could even get inside the heads of accountants.

Could he get inside the head of a girl who hated him?

To start, he had to remember what he’d done. He *deserved* that hurt.

Did *she*? He closed his eyes, thinking what it must be like to see him come slinking in each month. That man. That horrible man. Couldn’t he just let her move on?

He’ll understand …

What if he didn’t want to?

Damn. Too late.

“Hey, Call,” he said, opening his eyes and looking to Short Boring Guy. “I need you to set up a delivery for me. Some money to be paid to a young woman and her family. Um, every month. She has her own kid now, and needs the cash on time. It’s a meeting I’m supposed to do in person, but I’m … getting so busy. Yes, too busy, you see…”

“Many of our clients have similar needs, Master Wayne,” Short Boring Guy said. “Give us the address and we’ll see it is handled with discretion.”

Why’d they say it that way? Well, regardless, Jaxy had been right. If he was going to be dead, he could at least be the polite kind what didn’t try to crawl out of the forest and eat you during thunderstorms.

Even corpses needed standards.

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17

Steris had been doing a good job lately, she thought, of understanding other people. Once, she'd assumed they had the same worries she did, but hid their anxiety extremely well. As she'd grown older, she'd come to understand something more incredible. They just *didn't feel* that anxiety.

They didn't have a constant, hovering worry in the back of their brain, whispering they'd forgotten something important. They didn't spend hours thinking about the mistakes they'd made, and how they could have planned better. They lived in a perpetual state between blessed contentment and frightening ignorance.

Then she'd grown even older. She'd married Waxillium. She'd made friends—real ones—and had come to see more clearly. Everyone saw the world differently, and the Survivor had made people to complement one another. Metal and alloy. A Push for every Pull.

The others responded to the explosion below with a strange excitement and eagerness, practically racing one another to the door. But what if the steps were destabilized? Steris had a whole list of protocols to follow if there was an explosion in the lab—she'd spent three nights developing it.

She loved them. And so she wanted to cry out a warning, hold them back safe, forbid them from risking themselves. She also knew how extreme she got sometimes. That was the biggest revelation of recent years—helped by discussions with the women of her book group. Some of her preparations went beyond helpful. Understanding that line was vital to understanding herself.

And she had to admit, today the others showed *some* wisdom. They let VenDell go first, at her suggestion, since a fall wouldn't hurt him. Wax went next, since he could more or less fly if the steps collapsed. They hesitated at the bottom of the stairs—in case anything further was going to blow—before they opened the reinforced door.

"Wait!" Steris said, then dug in her handbag. "Masks."

She distributed the cloth masks to everyone, even Allik, since a wooden one wouldn't filter the air for him. They took the masks absently, or maybe even with a bit of an eye roll. All except Wax, who smiled at her as he put his on.

He liked her preparations. He found it endearing. But beyond that, he appreciated it. He thought she was useful, not persnickety.

"Anything on your watch list for explosions?" he asked.

She felt warm as she dug out her book of home emergencies. Yes, she knew she could be extreme. At the same time, making these was therapeutic. Her fears eased once she wrote them down. If she'd thought of something, catalogued it and considered it, then it stopped having power over her—she had power over *it*.

"Acids on the floor," she noted. "Those could mix to produce poisonous fumes. Glass shards. Secondary explosions—particularly from exposed harmonium. Those are my big fears."

He considered. "Marasi," he said as she pushed open the door, "I was testing with hydrochloric and hypochlorous acids."

"Which means?"

"Chlorine gas," he said.

VenDell grabbed Marasi's arm. Kandra had a *thing* about acids.

To Steris's surprise, they listened to her. Since the powerful ventilators installed in the basement weren't working, they let her fetch a room fan and set it up. Then they all returned up the steps and stood outside the mansion to allow the place to ventilate. When they went back down, everyone wore their masks without complaint and let her test the air with a kit. From there, they were careful where they stepped as they inspected the room.

The door to the safe box had taken a little jaunt across the room, and was now embedded deep into the thick concrete of the far wall. The steel of the box itself had been mangled beyond repair. And the rest of the room …

Well, it appeared that she’d have to put in an order for a new spectroscope. And a centrifuge. And some more flasks. And … um … new walls …

She resisted her urge to begin sweeping the glass to avert the hazard of stepping on it. Instead she stuck near to Waxillium. He might discover something interesting.

“Rusts,” he said, walking over to the remnants of the safe box. “This thing survived harmonium detonations of up to three ounces. I used less than a *tenth* of that in this experiment.”

He reached for the top of what remained of the box.

Steris wagged a glove in front of him.

“Right,” he said, slipping it on, then feeling around the top of the broken steel box. His hand came away dusted with some black shavings—a fine metal powder. VenDell walked up beside them. Marasi was inspecting the safe box’s door, while Allik had fetched a broom from above and was sweeping up the glass.

Steris had already liked him, of course, primarily because of how he treated her sister. But in that moment, her estimation of him went up another notch.

“We need to test these shavings,” Wax said. “But … I don’t think this is either atium or lerasium. It looks like remnants of iron from the equipment.”

Steris gathered them in some specimen pouches anyway. Waxillium leaned into the broken box on the wall, then used a small file from his pocket to harvest something smoldering inside.

“Harmonium,” he said as Steris dug out an extra vial of oil for him to put it into. “Plastered across the back of the box. I … think the experiment failed. It didn’t divide.”

“Actually,” VenDell said, “I think you managed something far, far more dangerous.” He took out a little notebook. “How much harmonium did you use in here? A few grams?”

“Around half a gram.”

“This explosive force…” VenDell said. “This level of destruction … from such a small sample. It’s possible, but only if…”

“What?” Wax said.

“This explosion was not caused by the division of the metals,” VenDell said. “This level of energy release could happen *only* if some of the Investiture or the matter itself was transformed into energy.”

He seemed to notice their confusion, so he continued. “I believe I’ve lectured you at length about the nature of Investiture. It is a particular study of mine. Along with my foremost expertise on skulls…”

“Not for sale,” Wax reminded him.

“Mine is,” Steris said.

Both looked at her.

“Why would I need it when I’m dead?” she asked. “Seems much better to have the money now.”

“As I always say,” VenDell replied. “Your impermanence is outlived by the beautiful internal shells you create—like sand medallions from the ocean, so are the bones of the human being. A lasting testimony of your presence on Scadrial. We shall discuss the terms of your sale at a later date, Lady Ladrian.

“For now, let me be brief. Everything in the cosmere is made up of one of three essences. The first is matter: the physical substances around you. Formed of axi, the smallest possible thing we know.”

“There are things that … aren’t matter?” Steris asked.

“Of course,” he said. “There’s energy.” He waved to the ceiling, where two of the room’s recessed and reinforced lights were still working. “Electricity, heat, light … Your kind has been harnessing it quite well lately. Good for you. Very modern.”

“And the third?” Wax asked.

“Investiture,” VenDell said. “The essence of the gods. Everything has an Invested component, normally inaccessible without certain abilities. When you burn metals, Lord Ladrian, you pull Investiture directly from the Spiritual Realm and use it to do work. Much like energy does work in those lights. But here is the key idea: Investiture, matter, and energy are all the *same,* fundamentally.”

“I … felt that, once,” Waxillium said, expression distant. “When I held the Bands. That all things were one substance.”

“Indeed!” VenDell replied. “And states can change from one to the other. Energy can become Investiture. This is the soul of Feruchemy. Investiture can become matter. That is where harmonium comes from. And matter can *become* energy.”

“And an example of that is…” Steris said.

VenDell nodded to the destroyed room. “We just witnessed it, I believe. There is an *incredible* amount of energy trapped inside matter. You managed to release some of it—only a small amount of what you put in that box, but still. If you found a way to release its full potential … Well, Harmony says the destructive power of it frightens him. Deeply.”

“It should,” Waxillium said. “Because this was easy to accomplish. Far too easy.”

“Well,” VenDell said, “it does require two very rare substances. And a great deal of energy, correct?”

“A great deal,” he admitted. “For so small a sample. It would take quite a bit of electricity to scale this up. But the destructive potential…”

“Agreed.” VenDell’s skin had gone … not just pale, but actually translucent. “I … should report this. If you don’t mind, I’ll be upstairs communing with Harmony. Excuse me.”

Waxillium shot Steris a look. “Worst case?” he asked.

She considered. What was the worst thing that could happen? It seemed obvious to her.

“What if the Set already knows about this?” she asked. “Marasi said the dying man mentioned returning ash to the Basin. Maybe they plan to use bombs?”

Wax nodded, grim. He’d considered the same thing.

“If the Set has discovered this interaction,” she said, “then it was likely by accident—or through an experiment like ours. There might be a record of it.”

“We could search for unexplained explosions in the Outer Cities,” Wax said. “Smart. Ashes … What if an explosive like this were placed in one of the old Ashmounts? Could they be restarted?”

“That sounds appropriately terrifying,” Steris said, feeling a deep nausea. How had she never considered that possibility? Looked like she had some planning to worry about. But first things first. “I’ll order broadsheets from the Outer Cities from the library and have them delivered to the penthouse. We can start there.”

Wax nodded. “With Marasi’s authority, you should be able to access the constabulary records too.”

It was an excellent suggestion. Steris walked to the back of the room, passing Allik—who had found some remnants of his biscuits splattered on the wall—and stepped up to Marasi. It had been … pleasant spending more time with her lately. Their childhood hadn’t always encouraged sisterly affection. Their father—who was now retired to a country estate—had been embarrassed by Marasi’s illegitimate status. Steris had always worried Marasi would see it as a flaw in her*self* rather than in their *father.*

Marasi seemed lost in thought, though what she found fascinating about the broken door was beyond Steris. However, she stayed quiet, not wishing to interrupt. Silence didn’t bother Steris. It was a purely neutral experience.

“The world is changing so fast,” Marasi finally whispered. “I’m barely accustomed to electric lights, let alone the airships. Then there’s this god … from another world. Now an explosive, a pinch of which can destroy a room…”

“I’m worried too,” Steris said. “I wish recent events had been possible to anticipate.”

“Makes me wonder,” Marasi said, “why I’m spending my time on murder cases and basic crimes. I realize they are important … but there are people out there, Steris, who know about it all. Who are making moves that change the fates of planets. They have no oversight, so far as I can tell. They’re probably *happy* to see us chasing down ordinary criminals and leaving them alone.”

“That’s why you hunt the Set,” Steris said, nodding. “Why you’ve devoted so much to them, when most in the precinct think you’re going a little overboard.”

Marasi chuckled. “Runs in the family, I guess.”

Steris smiled, then felt foolish, as Marasi wouldn't be able to see it behind her face mask. Before Steris could say something, however, Waxillium blew himself up.

It was a much smaller detonation, fortunately, but it was forceful enough to throw him back and drop him to the ground. Steris ran over, worried—and found him dazed, but relatively unharmed. He took her arm as he sat up, shaking his head, his nice vest—a Versuli, no less—ripped and charred. The apron she'd provided had protected it somewhat.

He brushed himself off. Though he didn't like to admit it, he *was* getting older. Being exploded when you were twenty was far different from being exploded when you were fifty.

"So," he said to her, "you mentioned something about secondary explosions?"

"It was on my list," she whispered.

"It's all right," he said, patting her hand. "I feel fine. I just did something stupid. I was gathering that harmonium plastered against the back of the safe box. It's too valuable to leave, and it must have reacted to the air or some liquid left from an earlier experiment—"

He sneezed, then smiled at her reassuringly. His mask was nowhere to be seen; it must have blown free in the explosion.

She hid her worry for him. Upon marrying Waxillium Ladrian, there was one thing she had vowed to herself: She wouldn't stop fretting about him, but she *would not* prevent him from being the person he wanted to be.

Each time he decided on an investigation, it terrified her. She did not let that control how she treated him. She would *not* be an obstacle. She loved him too much for that. Instead she did her best to be part of his world. It was far less frightening to be shot at than to sit at home wondering if *he* was being shot at.

It was to her eternal gratification that he, in turn, tried to be part of her world. Taking more interest in politics. Spending time with her doing the finances. They fit together, better than she'd ever dreamed they would. And she still felt warm every time they touched.

"Let's get some tea," Wax said, climbing to his feet with her help, "and talk this over."

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Marasi settled into the couch, her ears ringing from the second explosion. Allik sat beside her, mask down—he tended to lower it when he chewed gum, as he was doing now. Chewing visibly was a cultural taboo for him. Odd. If there was one thing it should be *normal* to lift a mask for, it was eating.

Still, she wrapped her arm around his and let him rest his head on her shoulder. Rusts, it was nice to have him around full-time these days. The early years of their relationship had been sixteen different varieties of frustrating.

While they waited for VenDell to finish his report to Harmony, Wax talked about meeting the airship—and the new ambassador. She felt Allik grow tense at the description.

“This is Daal the Primary,” he explained to the rest of them. “He … is very well respected by the Hosts.”

“I could tell he was important politically,” Wax said.

“No, Wax,” Marasi said. “Respected by the Hosts means he was successful in war.”

“So his arrival *is* a threat,” Steris said, nestled against Wax with her notebook out, shoes off, her stockinged feet up to the side in a posture that actually seemed *relaxed.*

She’s changed so much, Marasi thought. She could remember a time when Steris wouldn’t have dared take her shoes off in company. She’d have sat with perfect posture, trying to ensure she was holding her tea and saucer level.

Marasi had always loved her sister, even when resentment or forced distance had interfered, but she'd never considered Steris *pleasant.* Not until these recent years. Part of that had been Steris changing, but another part had been realizing that she and Steris had always felt the same burdens—that sense of entrapment.

"I wouldn't say it's a threat, Steris," Allik said. "Not specifically. But if it is true, and the Consortium has finally been achieved—the five nations agreeing to put a common face northward—then this is … a symbol? They send you their best. They want you to know it."

"Their best," Wax said, "and most stern, I assume? He is certainly more unyielding than his predecessor."

"Yes, Adjective Waxillium," Allik said, nodding. "They want you to know that they will not be bullied."

"He said," Wax told them, "that one of his goals was to bring the Bands of Mourning back to his people. Is that still a sore issue?"

"You have no idea," Allik said. "Us agreeing to leave the Bands here, it's like … like we left you with the body of our dead father, yah? A body that is also a powerful weapon. Nobody liked that decision.

"Sending him here, having him say he'll get the Bands back … this is a symbol, yah? A statement? They have been too lax with your people, and wish to indicate this laxness will end." He shifted in place, then lifted his mask. "Sorry."

"You didn't choose this, Allik."

"No," he said. "But I didn't *not* choose it."

"Dear, yes you did." Marasi squeezed his arm. "You don't have to take responsibility for *everything.*"

He smiled at her, then put his mask down. Footsteps announced what she thought was VenDell returning, but then Wayne burst into the sitting room instead.

"Hey!" he said. "You all got blowed up, and you didn't *wait for me*?"

"Waxillium got blowed up," Steris said. "The rest of us merely witnessed it. I think he did it on purpose to annoy you."

“I’m rusting sure,” Wayne said, narrowing his eyes at Wax. “You okay, mate?”

“My ears are ringing,” Wax said, “and I’ve been reminded—quite profoundly—that I’m *at least* two decades past prime exploding age. But I should be fine.”

“Glad you’re back, Wayne,” Marasi said, leaning forward. “Because we need to plan.”

“Yup, glad to be back,” he muttered. “Bein’ the fifth in a room is what every feller wants, yes indeed.” He stomped over to the small serving table and poured a cup of tea—then left the cup on the table and settled down in an easy chair with the *entire teapot.* “What?” he said to everyone’s stares. “It’s almost gone, an’ I like the spigot part. Fun to drink outta.”

He demonstrated, which made Steris put her hand to her face. Marasi sighed, but didn’t say anything. If he was sitting then he was less likely to steal something. She did check her pocketbook just in case.

“All right,” she said to the group. “I have the bones of a plan—imitating the Cycle to lead a local gang with a delivery scheduled to Bilming.”

Wax leaned forward. “Are we sure that interrogating the current captives won’t be enough?”

“They seemed like local flunkies,” Marasi said.

“Who will barely know anything,” Wax agreed. “So you’ll want some constables on your sting, ready to capture any Metalborn.”

“I keep telling Reddi we need a specialist team,” Marasi said. “A squad *just* for dealing with Metalborn. He keeps resisting. I think … he considers *us* that squad.”

As those words hung in the air, VenDell finally strode in, shaking his head. “I have,” he said, “been re-ordered to avail myself to you, with much urgency, in your current plans.”

“What did he say?” Marasi asked. “Does he know anything about the explosion?”

“Harmony is … worried.” VenDell paused. “Trellium has a repulsing effect on other forms of Investiture. Merely touching it to harmonium is dangerous—but doing as you did, heating and stretching the harmonium first, created what he called ‘an Invested matter-energy transference.’ That’s … very bad.”

“Did the news surprise him?” Wax asked. “Did Harmony seem shocked we were able to do this? Or did he expect it?”

“I couldn’t tell,” VenDell said. “He only said what I’ve relayed. More than that … well, Harmony can be difficult to read. I suppose I don’t need to tell you that. Did he send you a note, Lord Waxillium?”

“Yes,” Wax said. “I think he implied that I should make an earring out of trellium.”

“Whatever for?” Marasi said, frowning.

“I don’t know,” Wax replied. “I think he’s trying to get me interested, since I’ve ignored his last couple of invitations to commune with him.”

“This time it’s different, Waxillium,” VenDell said softly. “This time … Harmony is frightened.”

The room fell silent, aside from Wayne slurping his tea through the nozzle of the teapot. Marasi thought she saw him adding something from his flask to it, and she tried not to let that make her nauseous. Who spiked *tea*?

He’s hurting, she thought. *The breakup is final.* Rusts, despite everything else going on, she decided to find time to take him out to that noodle place he loved. Bring along a few of the other constables that he liked; remind him he had friends.

“My sting needs to happen soon,” she said to the room. “The book says the next shipment to Bilming is to go out in three days, and I want to be ready.”

“It’s a good plan, Marasi,” Wax said. “Steris and I have something we can work on while you’re planning.”

“Talking to Harmony?” she asked.

“Maybe,” he said, seeming distant. “I haven’t decided if I’m going to respond to him yet.”

Curiously, he didn’t indicate he wanted to be part of her mission. She’d have let him in, but she couldn’t quite get a handle on Wax these days. The way he’d hung those Roughs coats in the entryway had an air of finality, like a shrine to his old life. That said, when his deputized status had come up for renewal last year, he'd asked Reddi to maintain his position.

Wax glanced at Steris, who was leaning against him as she scribbled notes. "We thought of something earlier," he said to Marasi. "It's vital that we know if the Set has discovered the explosive potential of mixing harmonium and trellium. We're going to do research to see what we can find."

"Sounds good," Marasi said, nodding.

Well, that confirmed it. A few years ago, she might have been happy to hear he was staying out of her investigation, but she'd quashed that feeling. She was proud of not letting his shadow—long though it was—blot out her accomplishments. Besides, she'd had her chance to become the hero in Wax's place—she'd held the Bands of Mourning herself before turning them over to Wax. That simply wasn't who she was.

So today, she was sad to hear he wouldn't join her. Even worried, as she realized she'd assumed he would be there on this one. If she actually had a chance at high-level members of the Set … well, this could finally break the case open. And lead to answers.

But … she couldn't force him. Shouldn't force him. If he wasn't feeling as spry as he once had, then who was she to object?

"I'll go do some more listenin' to those fellows in prison," Wayne said. "VenDell, you want to come with? Maybe I could give you tips on your accent?"

"Master Wayne," he said, "I am an immortal kandra with *hundreds* of years' experience doing impersonations."

"And you always sound snide and upper class," Wayne said, "in every body I've seen you use. So … want some tips or not, mate?"

"I…" He sighed. "Harmony did *directly order* me to be about this. Ugh. Field work is so *distasteful*. But I suppose I can't say no."

Marasi glanced at Wax, who had settled back on the couch, thoughtful. Holding the envelope that Harmony had sent him.

"All right then," she said. "Let's get to it."

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Three days later, Wax stood in his penthouse study, looking west toward Bilming. There was no mist tonight. Seemed like weeks since he'd seen any.

Preparations had gone well for Marasi's sting. The notebook had clear instructions on how to deliver the goods. Using intel from interrogations, Marasi had located the very trucks the captives had been planning to use. She had the exact outfits of the captives, and VenDell was playing the role of their leader. Wayne, in one of his finest disguises, was at his side to help sell the role. Even the boxes of goods were real.

They would leave sometime tonight. Wax wouldn't go to see them off, of course. He could be conspicuous, and Marasi had taken every conceivable step to make sure the enemy didn't spot the subterfuge.

They'll be safe, he told himself. *Their disguises are excellent, and she's extremely capable.*

This was the Basin, not some wayward town in the Roughs. Marasi had access to the finest constables in the city, along with resources in abundance. She didn't need an old Coinshot with an unloaded pistol who still felt the ache of having foolishly exploded his laboratory a few days ago.

Still, Wax lingered, looking through the wide picture windows of his small penthouse study. It had been exciting, these last years, watching the city grow electrified. He had evanotypes of the process, taken every few months from this high perspective. A grid of lights and streets, homes glowing with the calm light of progress, each adding another shimmering star to the Elendel constellation. Would the lights spread so far that eventually there wouldn't be any darkness at all?

Steris slipped over, then handed him a cup of tea. "With willow powder," she whispered. "For your aches."

"You think of everything," he said, taking a sip. "How are the kids?"

"Sleeping," she said. "We should be fine to go back to work."

Together they walked back into the living room, where practically every surface had been commandeered to hold stacks of broadsheets. They *could* have hired researchers to pick through it all, but why give someone else the fun?

And it *was* fun. Not of the sort that Wax would once have enjoyed, but fun was as much about the company as the activity. They settled down together on the floor—all of the seats had papers on them—and continued reading. Searching for any mentions of explosions in cities across the Basin.

To pass the time, they also looked for anything amusing.

"'Pickled Pachyderm Plays Piano,'" Steris said, holding one up. "Why do they always pick 'pachyderm' for these alliterative sentences?"

"Because it's a funny word?" Wax said, with a smile. "What's it pickled in?"

"Apparently it was sitting in a small swimming pool," Steris said. "I think that's a stretch."

He held up his own headline. "'Child Eats Tar. Mother Feeds Rat As Antidote.'"

"Oh, that *can't* be real," she said, taking the broadsheet from him. But it was a real story—and in a reputable paper as well. Turned out even the most highbrow of sources weren't above using a zinger to move copies on a slow news day. She grinned, setting it on her stack of amusing headlines.

For their true hunt, Steris had a system—because of course she did. They read only headlines at first, quickly skimming sheets for certain words in bold or large print. Anything that looked promising went into its own pile. But you didn't read the story, not yet. You'd want to read all of those together, to compare one against another and further winnow.

They were almost done with the most recent batch of broadsheets, delivered today. Wax enjoyed it, mostly for the time with his wife—though he seemed to still be suffering the aftereffects of the explosion. His vision kept behaving oddly, distorting at times for just a second or two. And his mind kept playing tricks on him, making him think he glimpsed blue Allomantic lines without burning metals.

He set aside worries over his health, and certainly did *not* say anything. He didn't want to concern Steris. He'd survived explosions before. His hand still ached from the mine detonation back in Dust's Beach …

"Here's one," Steris said, showing him a serious headline. "Explosion at a railway station."

Wax rubbed his chin as he read. "Sounds like a boiler malfunction. Not terribly suspicious."

"Perhaps it's covering something up?"

He shook his head. Seemed like an odd place to be running metallurgic experiments. Too many people nearby—but then again, *he*'d done his experiments in the basement of a mansion. So who knew?

Steris set it in the "maybe" pile, while he moved his current broadsheet—an account of a fire that was pretty obviously a lightning strike—into the "unlikely" pile. None of these felt right to him, which should have made him happy. Perhaps their enemies *hadn't* discovered the explosive interaction between harmonium and trellium.

Unfortunately, this sort of investigation could be frustrating for just that reason. He didn't *want* to find proof, because it would confirm his fears. Yet if they turned up nothing, they'd never know if it was because no proof existed, or because they had missed it.

"'Snake Sneaks Snoring Snails'?" Steris said, showing him one from her amusing pile. "I have to admire them for committing to the gimmick."

"Do snakes eat snails?" he asked.

"This one did, apparently." She smiled, and Preservation, he loved that smile. He found himself wishing this hunt were for lower stakes.

Ashes falling again, he thought, shivering. He'd often imagined what it would have been like to live in the mythical days before the Catacendre. When the Ascendant Warrior and Wax's own distant ancestor, the

Counselor of Gods, had walked the land. When people had moved through stories like the sun behind clouds on a mostly overcast day.

In those days, the world had been dying. Ash had been its skin, flaking off as it disintegrated …

He sighed, rubbing his eyes—seeing those odd flashes of blue. Fortunately, the tea was beginning to work and his headache was at last retreating.

“Wax?” Steris asked softly. “Do you wish you’d gone with Marasi and Wayne?”

“They’ll be fine,” he said. “They don’t need me.”

“That isn’t what I asked, love,” she said softly.

He thought for a moment. Then shook his head. “I don’t, Steris. I genuinely don’t. I realized it the other day. I’m … past that stage of my life. I really feel like I’m done.”

Except for one thing. The fact that his sister was involved. Still out there. Dangerous.

Most families had skeletons in the closet. And most of those were sensible enough to stay dead. His might be threatening the entire Basin.

Ash falling again …

But he *did* feel done. Ready to move on. So, he showed Steris an account of a series of broken windows in the city of Demoux. It seemed to be the result of a small twister—a smaller cousin to the more terrifying ones that struck the Roughs. But maybe it was an indication of a sharp pressure change, like an explosion?

They put it in the “unlikely” pile. Unfortunately, after an hour of this, they neared the end of the stacks with no solid leads. Just a lot of very unlikely possibilities.

Steris watched him as she moved another broadsheet to the unlikely pile. He knew what she was thinking, but she didn’t prod him.

“There is one thing,” he admitted to her. “My sister. I should be the one to deal with her. But I have important work to do here in Elendel. Besides, I’m not that man anymore.”

“Do you have to be *that* man or *this* man?” she asked.

“I have to make choices. Everyone does.”

“And what about when you initially came back to Elendel?” she asked. “When you decided to hang up your guns the first time?”

“This is different,” he explained. “Back then I was running from myself. I stopped running six years ago, in the mountains, Steris. *This* is what I want. *This* is who I want to be. I’m happy here.”

She leaned into him, a steady warmth at his side. “So long as you know,” she whispered, “that you don’t have to be one or the other. You don’t have to see yourself as two men, Wax, with two different lives. Those men are the same person. And he’s the one I love.”

He thought on that, considering those days when he’d come back to Elendel—determined to put his past in the Roughs behind him. Because it was what he thought he *should* do. And … well, because a part of him had been broken. A gouge that had eventually been ripped back open by Lessie’s return.

Lying near death on a frozen mountaintop to the south had changed his perspective. When he’d returned to Elendel, he’d been able to *live* again. Growing, changing. And yet … did that mean the past him was no *longer* him? Were the inner rings in a tree less a part of it just because they were no longer exposed to the air?

“I’m worried about them,” he admitted to Steris. “And … I’m worried about the safety of the Basin. I don’t want to act like I don’t trust Marasi and Wayne. But…” He reached into his pocket and took out the envelope with the earring. Which he still hadn’t used. “Last year, when VenDell offered me a mission, it didn’t have the same urgency. The same disquiet about it. I’m afraid that whatever is happening now has grown too big to ignore. Too dangerous to be stopped by detective work or police intervention, no matter how competent.”

“Another god,” Steris whispered.

He took out a second envelope. “I had this made,” he said, shaking something out of it. Another earring. With a red tinge to the metal. It was nothing more than a stud, with the only trellium portion the bar in the middle, as the metal couldn’t be melted to be forged.

“When I gave the trellium spike to the university for study,” he explained, “I asked them to fabricate this for me. Because Harmony suggested I'd need it."

"Do you believe what Marasi said? About another ashfall? The return of those … dark days?"

"I don't know," he said. "But VenDell says Harmony is afraid. And *that* has me terrified."

Steris tapped her finger on the stack of broadsheets in her lap. "Let's identify our worst-case scenario. Consider: What's the worst thing you can imagine, in regards to our current hunt?"

"My worst fear?" he said, thinking. "It's that we're years behind. That the Set has known about this interaction between harmonium and trellium for a great deal longer than we assume—maybe since that first Malwish airship crashed here. My fear is that the Set is not *beginning* a plan. My fear is that we're in the *end stages* of said plan."

"Is there anything we could search for to prove this?" Steris asked.

Wax stood up, surveying the room full of broadsheets, each stack from a different city. "Rusts," he said. "We shouldn't be searching for *accidental* explosions. We should be searching for proof of *intentional* ones. And we're looking at too recent a batch of papers—if it happened, it could be five or six years old by now." He paused. "They'd want to test. It wouldn't be one explosion long ago. It would be a series of them … hidden somehow … because if they have this weapon, they'll want to develop it. Improve it."

"How?" Steris asked. "Should we search for records of harmonium busts?"

"I doubt that would show up in the broadsheets," Wax said, turning around the room. "The Set is good at hiding its resource movement, especially of contraband. Marasi's investigation proves that."

So what? Was there any way to find what he wanted? Evidence of tests … of explosions they'd keep hidden …

"Earthquakes," Wax whispered.

"What was that?"

"Earthquakes," he said, kneeling beside Steris. "They would test explosions underground, in the caverns. Where they'd be contained and hidden. But they can't fool the seismographs."

They dug into the headlines again—but this time with a different set of criteria. And admittedly, Wax broke format a little, peeking at the contents of the stories rather than just looking for headlines. Steris poked him in the side if he spent too long doing this, but he was curious. And excited.

The answers had to be in here somewhere.

The search took a solid three hours of work. But as midnight passed, Wax found it. A series of articles from an Elendel broadsheet about something happening in Bilming.

"A subway?" Steris asked, frowning.

"Reports," Wax explained, "of odd earthquakes in the city, starting years ago. Officials quickly explained that Bilming had decided to build a subterranean rail line like Elendel."

"That could be valid," Steris said, reading another broadsheet expanding on the story. "We used explosives to blast away rock and build the subway."

"But why would Bilming *need* a subway? They have that elevated rail they're so proud of. They *love* showing it off. Plus, these explosions have been going for four and a half years—and they don't have a single subway line up and running."

"Suspicious," Steris said, scanning the next article. "Very suspicious. A new initiative started seven months ago … Reports of buildings being rattled by large-scale detonations … They were detected all the way here in Elendel."

"They're calling it a financial scandal, with construction companies leeching away funds. But it's obviously more."

Steris nodded vigorously. The broadsheet that had uncovered this wasn't the most reputable source—it was the latest one to carry that fool Jak's outlandish stories—but there *was* something here, as confirmed by several other broadsheets, now that they knew what they were looking for.

Rusts, he thought. The Set were testing beneath populated areas? Why? Was that just where they could find the cavern space? This might be even bigger than he'd feared. Hadn't Bilming been building a navy?

Yes. Other articles talked about it. Ostensibly, the Bilming shipyards were creating a defense force for the Basin, in case of attack from the

South. But they'd started *before* the arrival of the first Malwish airships—and they certainly liked to show off the capabilities of their guns.

Supposedly these ships were under Elendel's control. No one actually believed that though.

"Wax…" Steris said. "That list of shipments in Marasi's book. Where they were checking to see how tight customs was. How hard it would be to smuggle something *into* Elendel…"

A chill washed through Wax. What would they want to smuggle into Elendel?

A bomb.

"It looked like they were checking different cargo sizes," he said. "And how likely they were to be inspected when brought in via train or truck."

"And how big would this bomb be?" Steris said. "Theoretically."

"It's the generator that would be big," Wax explained. "If it works according to the mechanics we discovered, then they'd need a *great deal* of power. More than the simple lines to homes can carry, or even the lines to industrial locations. They'd likely have to build a very large housing for the device."

"Which explains why they were checking which sizes arouse suspicion and which don't. Wax, if you're right, then the broadsheets indicate they've been testing this for more than *four years*. Successfully. They might *have* the bomb already. They're just…"

"… looking for a way to get it into the city."

Rusts. He looked to the side table, and the envelopes. Then, finally, he slipped the first earring out—the one Harmony had sent him. It had been six years. He'd grown increasingly reticent to have anything to do with Harmony. He no longer hated God, but still …

He looked to Steris, who nodded. So he put the earring in.

And was suddenly in another place.

Floating, seeing the entire world before him, and the dark vastness beyond. He spent a moment disoriented, though his feet felt like they were on solid ground. It was unnerving.

This didn't normally happen when he used an earring. But he *had* been here once before. On that frozen mountaintop.

Harmony stood in the distance. A serene figure in traditional Terris robes. Kindly eyes. Hesitant at first, Wax walked across the invisible floor toward Harmony. If he let his eyes unfocus, Harmony seemed as vast as the cosmere—two sweeping wings. One white, one black. Spinning together in the middle, the edges extending to infinity.

At the heart of it was that figure. Terris. Head shaved smooth. Rounded features, with an elongated face. The face of a legend, standing with hands clasped behind his back. Looking worried.

“Last time I was here,” Wax noted, “I was dead.”

“Dying,” Harmony said. “On the very cusp of death. Sometimes I think that’s where I reside. Always there, like a coin balanced on edge … a gulf on either side…”

“Where is the redness I saw last time?” Wax asked, nodding to the planet. Six years ago a red haze had been coming over the planet, as if to swallow it. “Did you drive it off?”

“No,” Harmony said softly. “It Invested the planet. Invested … me. What you saw was a shroud, Waxillium. I responded too slowly. It is … a failing that grows more dangerous in me. By the time I realized what was happening, that shroud had come over me. It doesn’t hurt, it merely dampens my ability to see.”

“You mean…”

“I don’t know what’s happening,” Harmony said softly, staring down at the planet. “What is Trell doing? What are they planning? They put that haze up as a kind of smoke screen. When I attacked it, the haze infected my ability to see the future. Temporarily. I will be rid of it in a few years. That’s nothing on the timescale of gods. And yet…”

“And yet, the danger is right now.”

“Yes,” Harmony said. “Like a nearsighted person, I can see the danger now that it has come very close.” He hesitated, then looked to Wax. “I can see you, hear you. We are Connected. And so, I know what you’ve discovered. I thought I had more time. I realize only now that I have been moving too slowly. Yet again, too slowly…”

Wax considered that, gave it due weight. These weren’t matters or concepts one took lightly. God blinded. All of them years behind the enemy.

A bomb being developed and a search for a way into the heart of his city.

One question rose to the surface. An old lawman's adage. If you wanted to stop a man, you needed to know what he wanted. Who he *was*.

"Harmony," he said, "who is Trell?"

"Trell is the god Autonomy," Harmony replied. "What we call a Shard of Adonalsium. Autonomy carries power like my own, a dangerous force for manipulating the very nature of reality and existence. Though Autonomy is held by a woman named Bavadin, her many different faces—or avatars—act with independence. Trell, a male god from the ancient records, can be considered one of these."

Wax blinked.

"You were not expecting so straightforward an answer?" Harmony asked.

"I've not always gotten them in the past."

"I'm trying to do better."

That was … somehow as unnerving as hearing that Harmony had been blinded. God should not *have* to get better.

"You rarely get to speak to Autonomy herself," Harmony continued. "As I've come to find, she speaks through avatars. Sometimes pieces of herself that she's allowed to gain a semblance of self-awareness, sometimes through chosen people she has given a portion of her power.

"Autonomy decided to destroy our world, as it is a dangerous threat to her. But I believe she has been persuaded to let it persist, so long as it can be … controlled. Autonomy offered me an ultimatum last year, as my blinding was taking effect and when she assumed I would be the most desperate. She demanded I give this world to her, then move to another.

"I rejected the demand—and one of the last things I saw was the person Autonomy has chosen. The same one who persuaded her that this world had value, and who presented a plan for its domination."

"My sister?"

Harmony nodded. "The leader of the Set. Invested by Autonomy. Avatar of a god on this world."

Wax exhaled softly. Telsin.

Thinking of her brought an immediate stab of betrayal. He remembered exactly how it had felt to realize, in one terrible moment, that she would shoot him. Despite his love, his attempts to help her, she'd been working against him all along.

That pain was acute, despite the years. And he realized that he hadn't left *everything* about his past behind. A thread lingered, a raw nerve exposed to the air.

Thinking of Telsin with the power of a deity in her hands … Rusts.

She'd spent her youth manipulating people. Getting her way. Telsin *always* got her way. It had been bad enough when she'd been able to persuade the adults she was sweet, obedient, and perfect—all the while sneaking out with her friends. It had become dangerous when she'd begun playing much higher-stakes games with the city's elite. And it had become deadly when she'd discovered the Set and started shaping world politics.

What would she do with *this*?

"You're only now telling me?" Wax demanded.

"I contacted you a year ago," Harmony said, "when I was first blinded. You … still did not want to speak with me. And I was trying to respect that."

Damn.

"But Wax," Harmony said softly, "it is time again. I need a sword."

A sword. That was what he'd been when he'd killed Lessie the second time. Cleaning up God's mess. Executing his rogue kandra driven mad by lack of spikes.

"I know you've changed," Harmony said. "I heard you earlier. I know you're happy. I know you want nothing more to do with my works."

"But my sister," Wax said, "has the power of a god. Rusts. Marasi and Wayne—does she know what they're planning with this sting? Are my friends in danger?"

"I wish I could say," Harmony replied. "So far as I know, the enemy knows nothing of their plan. But … I'm blind, and your sister is extremely dangerous. Wax, I have tried to handle this in other ways. I have failed. And so, I come back to the one weapon I've always been able to rely upon."

Wax took a deep breath. "Tell me what you know."

“Are you agreeing?”

“First tell me what you know. About my sister’s plans, about this god. Anything relevant.”

“I’ve shared most of it,” Harmony said. “You should know, perhaps, that each of these powers—these Shards—has what we call an Intent. A driving motivation. I bear two: one driving me to preserve and protect, the other driving me to destroy.

“Autonomy is driven to divide off from the rest of us, go her own way. She pushes her followers to prove themselves, and she rewards those who are bold, who survive against the odds. She respects big plans and big accomplishments. I presume this is why your sister has persuaded Autonomy not to destroy our planet outright. Or at least to delay doing so.”

“Telsin is still planning something catastrophic,” Wax said. “She’s trying to destroy Elendel. But what does that get her? The other cities will revolt against such a terrible act of destruction; she can’t think they’ll follow her if she kills so many.”

“She’s desperate,” Harmony said. “Your sister has set up in Bilming. You’ll find her there, building a new empire. She must know that her god is still eager to wage war on our people and annihilate them. So, she is trying what she can. If Telsin destroys Elendel, she can try to take control of the Basin and prove to Trell that she is capable of ruling this planet. I do not know if this is her true motive, but it is what seems most likely.” Harmony glanced to him. “I’m sorry. I had not realized she would go this far.”

Wax looked away, but it was difficult to blame Harmony. Wax himself had been blind to Telsin for years—and he didn’t have the excuse of a divine shroud. He’d always assumed that he of all people knew the real her. Until he’d found himself just another pawn in her games, shown a false face. Made to feel an idiot. Why had he thought she would play everyone except him?

Because a part of him had loved his sister. Right up until the moment when she’d pulled the trigger and he’d known the truth. Family was nothing to her but a powerful cord with which to bind and manipulate.

“If what you have discovered is true,” Harmony said, “we might not have much time for me to free myself from my shroud. Autonomy mobilizes an army from offworld to invade and destroy everyone on this planet. Telsin moves to circumvent that. Both plans are catastrophic to us, and both are in motion.”

Damn. Wax took a deep breath. “You had me make a second earring. That’s what finally convinced me to talk to you. Why?”

“I hoped that would work,” Harmony said, a hint of a smile on his lips. “A good mystery is the best invitation.”

“And? What do I do with it?”

“When Vin, the Ascendant Warrior, was resisting Ruin, she didn’t realize that the little earring she wore linked her to him. It let him get inside her head, speak with her. Connect to her.” He nodded to Wax’s earring. “With a trellium spike, you will be Connected to Trell’s avatar—much as you now are to me. She will be able to sense you, and you her.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Wax said, shaking his head. “Whenever the two of us meet, she gets the better of me. I shouldn’t try to play her games.”

Harmony smiled. A faint smile, from one too burdened to be eager about the emotion. He actually seemed to do it on purpose, with effort. “As you wish. It is a tool for you to use. I’ve lost games over and over against Autonomy, but I still have help I can send you. Some do not realize I was behind their mobilization. Yet I did not know the urgency of our task. I did not know their bomb might be ready. I am caught flat-footed. That was their goal, I think. So I must ask. Will you be my sword again, Waxillium?”

“It is absolutely necessary?”

“That depends,” he said, “on how you feel about the prospect of your sister taking my place as this planet’s steward.”

“That’s … actually a possibility?”

“Yes.”

“Damn.”

“Disrupt Telsin’s plan, and Autonomy will abandon her. That is our best bet.”

“And the army Autonomy is bringing?”

“We will have to hope we have time to stop them after your sister’s plan is subverted.”

It didn’t sound like much of a strategy. He looked to Harmony, and saw something different this time. Not the vastness of the powers, or even the figure of legend. But a man. Thrust into a war that none of them had been ready for, playing catch-up to learn powers that others had presumably spent millennia mastering.

He’s doing his best, Wax thought. *And struggling to avoid being crushed by the opposing powers he holds. He needs help, and I’m all there is.*

When Wax had run to the Roughs, it had been to escape—but he’d *stayed* because people needed him.

He’d found peace in Elendel. He wouldn’t return to the field because he wanted it or needed it. This time, he would go because he was *needed*.

“Final time?” Wax said.

“I promise,” Harmony said. “Final time.”

“All right,” Wax said, and felt a weight settle onto him. “I’ll stop Telsin. But you’re going to have to deal with this Autonomy.”

“Buy me time,” Harmony said. “Time to recover. Time to build greater alliances in the years to come, so we can face her as a unified planet.”

“I still don’t know how bombing Elendel gets Telsin what she wants,” he said. “It’s too extreme. She’s more rational than that. She’s *got* to be planning to threaten us with it until we bend. Maybe she intends to … I don’t know, detonate one in an Ashmount to cow us?”

“Perhaps. I do not know her ultimate plan. I’m sorry.”

A mystery then. With terrible stakes. Wax met Harmony’s eyes. “Is there anything you’re not telling me?”

“Many things,” Harmony admitted.

“Will any of them hurt, like what happened with Lessie?”

“Not on purpose,” Harmony said. “But I cannot promise you will survive this. Or that if you do, it will be without pain. I can’t promise much these days.”

Wax made a fist.

“Do you trust me, Waxillium?” God asked.

“No,” Wax said honestly. “But I trust her less. I’ve already said that I’ll help. But I’m not only a sword, Harmony. I’m a lawman too. I’ll find out what Telsin is doing. I'll answer the questions you cannot. I'll stop her that way."

"Thank you."

In a heartbeat, Wax was back in his penthouse. He'd never left, not physically. Steris knelt beside him, worried.

"He's been blinded," Wax said to her. "He didn't realize how urgent the problem was, and he's asked me to help. To intervene, and stop my sister." He took her by the arm. "I'm sorry. I need to go. I know you'll worry about me."

"Of course I will," she said. "But do you think I won't worry if you stay? If you're right about all of this…" She stood up. "It's not me or them, Wax. It's not politics or Allomancy. It's not me or Lessie. It's *never* been either/or. That part of your life isn't over merely because you didn't need it for a while. You need it now. We all do."

He stood up beside her. "I'll need to fetch my coat and my guns from the mansion."

"I have them here," she said, moving some stacks of broadsheets to uncover a cleaner's bag—from which she removed his mistcoat.

"I should have guessed that you'd have it laundered," he said. "Thank you for—"

There was a knock at the front door. They exchanged a look. Who was coming by at this hour of night, when even the servants had been dismissed? Wax walked to check, and outside—in the small hallway that led to the elevator foyer—he found a wrapped package.

He closed the door and showed the package to Steris. When unwrapped, it revealed a row of sixteen vials with—it appeared—a solution of alcohol and metal flakes inside. The last had a red-painted cork and a note. *Use the others instead of your normal vials. Use the last in an emergency only.*

Wax took these solemnly. Then, from the locked cabinet by the wall, he removed his strongbox—and from that two fully aluminum pistols, among Ranette's finest creations. Vindication II and the Steel Survivor.

The first was a powerful, large-caliber gun designed to hold hazekiller rounds in two extra chambers. Those rounds were oversized, the bullets designed with a secondary explosion for dealing with Hemalurgists. Ranette had come up with them to forcibly eject a spike from a person’s body at close range. The second gun was a sleek mid-caliber pistol with an extra-long barrel for firing precision rounds. He generally loaded it with ordinary bullets that could be Pushed.

They slid into holsters that up until recently had held his unloaded guns. There was more in the box too. A gun bag, two feet long, holding something extra special, in several pieces that could be assembled. Ranette’s most deadly design. He hesitated as he put a hand on it. Inside was a weapon not for a lawman, but for a soldier. Intent on destruction.

He put it back in the gun box. He wasn’t going to need that. He was a lawman.

Steris bustled over with his large shoulder bag, extra wide and made of thick leather, for supplies. She packed his ammunition and extra metal vials—and, knowing her, a lunch—as he hurriedly gathered a few other things he thought he might need from the study. This included a belt with a pouch lined in aluminum, for holding metal vials. He could clip it closed, and the glass vials inside would be untouchable to enemy Allomancers. Into this he loaded half of the vials Harmony had sent.

When he returned, she held out his mistcoat for him. He took it in a two-handed grip.

“Steris,” he said, “the Senate … I can’t be in two places at once. Can you talk to the governor? This is a bad time for me to leave, with the new ambassador here. Hell … it might not be bad to prepare the governor for the worst, explaining about the potential for a bomb.”

“I don’t know if he will listen,” Steris said. “The senators and the governor don’t even listen to you—they’ll outright ignore me.”

“Still, we should try.”

“We … could appoint someone to represent the house…”

“Steris,” he said, “I stepped up to lead the house because of *your* dreams of what we could do. Your wonderful dreams. You saw in me someone who could do what needed to be done, and you were right.” He took her gently by the shoulder. “I see in you the same person. A better one. I’ve been working on your ideas these last years. Your *genius.* You can lead as well as I can. Better, even.”

"I'm not good with people," she whispered. "I'll ruin it. I've thought, and I've planned, and I always reach the same conclusion. I can't be trusted with something this important; we need someone more suitable."

"What if I think otherwise?" Wax said. "What if I think you're absolutely the *best* person to represent our house? War is building—and it's going to get worse if I do uncover a conspiracy in Bilming. We need someone to stop the hotheads. Someone meticulous, who has considered all the possibilities."

"I … I don't know. If I can do it."

"*I* believe in you, Steris. I will appoint someone else if you want. But I think you can do it best."

She met his eyes. Then, hesitantly, she nodded.

"Thank you," he said.

"If you *really* think this is best, then I will try. I am bad with people, but you are good with them. So it stands to reason that perhaps you are right. About me." She squeezed his arms. "Go. I will see to the Senate. Somehow."

He kissed her, still holding the mistcoat in one hand, wrapping his other arm around her. As he did, a small pair of hands gripped him and Steris around the legs.

"Max!" Steris said, breaking the embrace and looking down. "Why aren't you in bed?"

"Because I'm in here," he said.

She lifted him up as Wax stepped back and threw on his coat, then slung his heavy ammunition bag over his shoulder.

"You need to go fight monsters now?" Max asked.

"If I can find them," Wax said.

"You can," Max said. "You're the best detector that ever lived. Uncle Wayne told me. He said you can find any treasure there ever was to be found."

"I've already found the best treasures, Max," Wax said, turning—mistcoat tassels rustling in that old familiar way. Like whispers speaking an ancient tongue. "Now I just have to keep them safe."

He threw open the balcony doors and launched out into the sky toward the city of Bilming. Stars both above and beneath—with a highway lined in light pointing the way forward.

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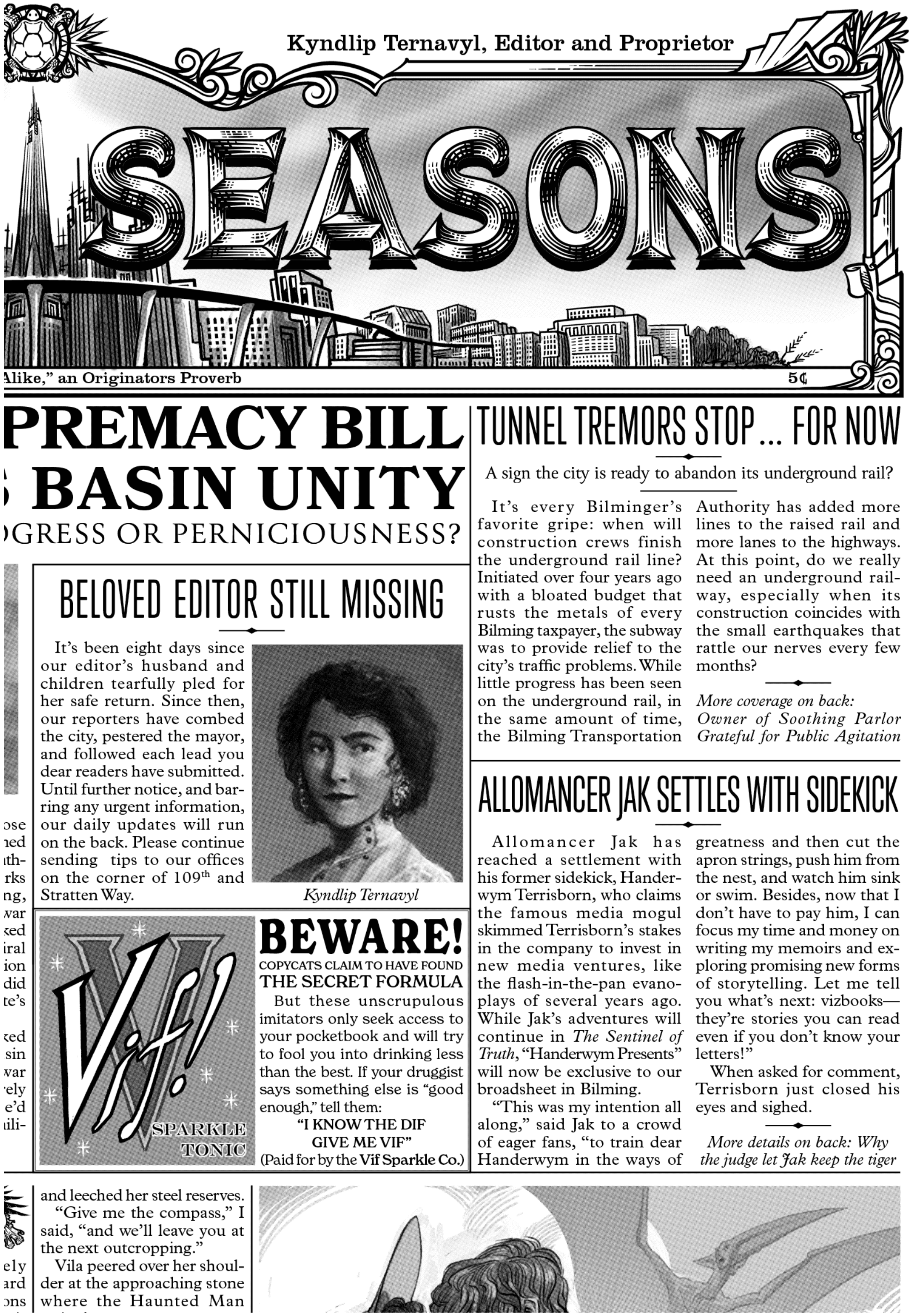

Kyndlip Ternavyl, Editor and Proprietor

SEASONS

Alike," an Originators Proverb

5¢

PREMACY BILL

BASIN UNITY

GRESS OR PERNICIOUSNESS?

BELOVED EDITOR STILL MISSING

It's been eight days since our editor's husband and children tearfully pled for her safe return. Since then, our reporters have combed the city, pestered the mayor, and followed each lead you dear readers have submitted. Until further notice, and barring any urgent information, our daily updates will run on the back. Please continue sending tips to our offices on the corner of 109th and Stratten Way.

Kyndlip Ternavyl

Vif!
SPARKLE TONIC

BEWARE!
COPYCATS CLAIM TO HAVE FOUND
THE SECRET FORMULA

But these unscrupulous imitators only seek access to your pocketbook and will try to fool you into drinking less than the best. If your druggist says something else is "good enough," tell them:

**"I KNOW THE DIF
GIVE ME VIF"**

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and leeched her steel reserves.

"Give me the compass," I said, "and we'll leave you at the next outcropping."

Vila peered over her shoulder at the approaching stone where the Haunted Man

TUNNEL TREMORS STOP … FOR NOW

A sign the city is ready to abandon its underground rail?

It's every Bilminger's favorite gripe: when will construction crews finish the underground rail line? Initiated over four years ago with a bloated budget that rusts the metals of every Bilming taxpayer, the subway was to provide relief to the city's traffic problems. While little progress has been seen on the underground rail, in the same amount of time, the Bilming Transportation Authority has added more lines to the raised rail and more lanes to the highways. At this point, do we really need an underground railway, especially when its construction coincides with the small earthquakes that rattle our nerves every few months?

◆

More coverage on back: Owner of Soothing Parlor Grateful for Public Agitation

ALLOMANCER JAK SETTLES WITH SIDEKICK

Allomancer Jak has reached a settlement with his former sidekick, Handerwym Terrisborn, who claims the famous media mogul skimmed Terrisborn's stakes in the company to invest in new media ventures, like the flash-in-the-pan evanoplays of several years ago. While Jak's adventures will continue in *The Sentinel of Truth*, "Handerwym Presents" will now be exclusive to our broadsheet in Bilming.

"This was my intention all along," said Jak to a crowd of eager fans, "to train dear Handerwym in the ways of greatness and then cut the apron strings, push him from the nest, and watch him sink or swim. Besides, now that I don't have to pay him, I can focus my time and money on writing my memoirs and exploring promising new forms of storytelling. Let me tell you what's next: vizbooks—they're stories you can read even if you don't know your letters!"

When asked for comment, Terrisborn just closed his eyes and sighed.

◆

More details on back: Why the judge let Jak keep the tiger

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Owner of Soothing Parlor Grateful for Public Agitation

ALLOMANCER JAK SETTLES WITH SIDEKICK

Allomancer Jak has reached a settlement with his former sidekick, Handerwym Terrisborn, who claims the famous media mogul skimmed Terrisborn's stakes in the company to invest in new media ventures, like the flash-in-the-pan evanoplays of several years ago. While Jak's adventures will continue in *The Sentinel of Truth,* "Handerwym Presents" will now be exclusive to our broadsheet in Bilming.

"This was my intention all along," said Jak to a crowd of eager fans, "to train dear Handerwym in the ways of greatness and then cut the apron strings, push him from the nest, and watch him sink or swim. Besides, now that I don't have to pay him, I can focus my time and money on writing my memoirs and exploring promising new forms of storytelling. Let me tell you what's next: vizbooks—they're stories you can read even if you don't know your letters!"

When asked for comment, Terrisborn just closed his eyes and sighed.

More details on back: Why the judge let Jak keep the tiger

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PART TWO

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Marasi got a few hours of sleep, nestled in the front seat of the truck as her convoy rolled toward Bilming. Fortunately they'd been able to recruit drivers from the constabulary night watch, so they were used to the hours. Hers wasn't the talkative type. The woman wore her jacket with the collar up, a cap on her head to shadow her face. The team had been told to maintain their disguises even while driving.

When Marasi had dozed off, they'd been traveling through the bleak darkness beyond Elendel. When she blinked awake, the sun was rising and they were passing the Bilming suburbs. Marasi had never been to the city, though it was only a few hours by train along the coast, but she had a good grasp on the politics of why this city was so important.

As traffic into the capital had grown overwhelming, Bilming had become an essential port and dockyard. Its seaside nature let it trade with other coastal towns, ignoring Elendel's railway monopoly. In addition, Bilming was a chief port for trade with the Southern Continent—where much commerce was being handled by traditional ocean shipping, not airship.

The discovery of those new lands had brought wealth into Bilming. And wealth meant power. Many in Elendel thought they had let the people of Bilming grow too independent—and in recent years, it had become the one city in the Basin that could legitimately rival Elendel.

Many in the capital spoke of Bilming snidely, pretending it was a rural outpost of half-educated sailors and drunken dockworkers. Marasi knew better. This wasn't a rural backwater; Bilming was a metropolis in the making.

She passed neatly laid-out suburbs—but even more swaths of land that had been set aside to eventually be filled. Many developments were mid-construction, houses being built, each in a different style, no two roofs matching one another. No two doorways in the same place. Yet there was a strange *symmetry* to it. One she couldn't quite pin down.

It was the same downtown, which—though still distant—she could see had half-finished pillars of skyscrapers growing up like the mythical spires of Kredik Shaw. A dominant building at the direct center was furthest along. It had to be a good seventy or eighty stories high, rivaling the tallest buildings in Elendel.

Each of the buildings—particularly the one at the center—had a strange aesthetic that mixed the feel of a fortress with modern sleek lines and steel finishings. As they drove closer, the roadway passed under a large elevated railway that ran in a circle around the city. Some sections were unfinished, but big swaths of it were already in operation.

Everything had a metallic feel to it, like burnished steel, enhanced by the skeletons of buildings rising up, their girders exposed. The finished buildings had metal roofs or siding—not always polished, and often with a patina. The overall effect gave the great variety of building shapes a cohesive theme.

She was impressed. Even half-finished, this was a city with a plan. The design screamed of industry, forward thinking, and accomplishment. They passed numerous billboards proclaiming the virtues of self-reliance and sovereignty. You didn't have to read far between the lines to see the tone those were setting. Independence from Elendel.

"You ever notice," her driver said, "how kids always draw houses the same way?"

Marasi frowned, glancing at her. The woman's voice was on the deeper side, but Marasi couldn't make out much about her. Marasi had chosen her truck at random, picking one that had boxes in the back, not constables—hoping that would help her sleep.

"I can't say that I've noticed," Marasi said.

“It’s strange,” the driver continued. “You can imagine the shape, of course. Square box. Triangular roof. Door right in the center. Two windows. Often a chimney, even though fewer and fewer homes have those these days. What house *actually* looks like that? Almost none. So why do kids draw them?”

“I guess it’s easy,” Marasi said.

“Perhaps,” her driver said. “Or maybe they’re not drawing a house. They’re drawing someone else’s *picture* of a house. What they’ve seen others make. An icon. A symbol.”

Marasi narrowed her eyes. “That’s an interesting observation, Constable … what was your name?”

“I go by Moonlight,” the woman said. “We like code names. It’s one of our things.”

“I … have never heard that word before.”

“You wouldn’t have, since you have no moon here.” The woman leaned back and stretched out her arm on the top of the steering wheel, causing her sleeve to inch back and reveal a red tattoo on her forearm, above the wrist. The same symbol that had been on the card left for her.

Slowly, cautiously, Marasi reached for the pistol in the holster under her arm.

“You won’t need that,” the woman said, her eyes still on the road. They’d been forced to slow considerably now that they were approaching the center of the city. Who would have guessed that an Outer City would have so much traffic?

“Where’s the constable who should have been driving this truck?” Marasi asked. “What did you do to her?”

“Nothing,” the woman said. “She’s fine. But I find it amusing that’s the first thing you ask. I mean, I understand—but maybe get your priorities straight, Marasi.”

Marasi kept her fingers lightly on the grip of the handgun, but didn’t draw it. “Was it you in the cavern? The person wearing a white mask?”

“It was black,” the woman said, passing that little test. “Yes. That was me.”

“And … are you human?”

"One hundred percent," the woman said. "I'm not a local though." She pulled off her cap, revealing straight black hair in a ponytail and uncommon features. A shape to the eyes Marasi had never seen, prominent cheekbones.

"Are you from the Southern Continent?" Marasi asked.

"No." Moonlight nodded to the city outside. "I've always hated Bilming. I should like the thought they put into design, yet the underlying message disturbs me. They're trying hard to make each building individual, but the way it comes together is too deliberate. It makes the artistry feel hollow."

"And why do you think that is?"

"Because of Trell's influence, obviously."

Marasi leaned forward. "Tell me. *Please.*"

Moonlight glanced at her for the first time. Such self-assured eyes, with a cocked half smile on her lips. This was a woman who had put herself at the very center of a group of constables and didn't seem the slightest bit worried.

"So hungry," Moonlight said. "We don't always share answers with outsiders, Marasi."

"I could have you arrested and interrogated."

"On what charges?"

"Interfering with constable business."

"Interfering? How? I was instructed to drive this truck."

"Don't play coy," Marasi said. "You're impersonating a constable—plus it's against the law to withhold information vital to an investigation."

The woman smiled, turning her eyes back to the road. "Strange how similar cops are, regardless of the planet."

Regardless of the *planet.* Rust and Ruin …

Marasi had known that there were other planets out there, of course. The kandra talked about it. But … rusts. It was still hard to accept.

They pulled to a halt as some traffic worked its way into the street ahead of them. As they did, a beggar came to Marasi's window. Per the notebook's instructions, Marasi unlatched the window and folded it down, then handed the beggar a few boxings. The dirty man slipped her a piece of paper.

“Can you get to Biggle Way?” Marasi asked, reading the note.

“Yeah,” Moonlight said, turning them down the next street. “That’s in the industrial district.”

Marasi’s truck pulled into the lead and the convoy followed her, all ten keeping in a tight double line. At the next corner, Wayne’s truck came up beside them. She could make him out talking the ear off his driver—who turned out to be Hoid, Wax’s coachman. How had *he* gotten involved in the sting?

“Can’t tell these days,” Moonlight said, “if I’m keeping watch on him, or if he’s keeping watch on me. Realistically, we’re both just keeping watch on the same third parties…”

“What. *Hoid?*” Marasi asked. “He’s been in Wax’s employ for years. He’s an odd fellow, but…”

In the next truck, Hoid glanced at them—past Marasi—and nodded to Moonlight.

Damn. What in the world? How much of her time had she wasted on bank robberies or protection rackets, when *this* was going on?

Whatever *this* was.

“Has it ever struck you,” Moonlight said, “how art is so destructive?”

“Art?” Marasi said, frowning. “Destructive?”

“Each new movement consumes the one that came before,” Moonlight said, starting them forward as the traffic began to creep into motion again. “Chops it up and feeds on the corpse. Takes the bones, but drapes new skin on them. Each new piece of art is in some way a parody of what has come before.”

“You sound like an artist yourself.”

“I have certain talents,” she said. “My experiences have given me an interest in the quirks of the artistic world—and its … *values,* you might say. Tell me. Let’s say you had one of only sixteen extremely rare pieces of art by the same artist. What would you do to ensure yours becomes the most valuable?”

“If I play along,” Marasi said, “will you tell me about Trell?”

“I’m trying to, right now.”

Marasi frowned, considering. “I have one of sixteen pieces of art … and I must ensure mine is the most valuable?”

“Yup.”

“I’d try to create an air of mystique around it,” Marasi said. “I wouldn’t show it off. I’d let the other fifteen become common by comparison—and the value of mine would increase as people shared the story. There *is* one more. One *no one* has seen.”

“Clever,” Moonlight said. “I’m impressed.”

“And what would you do?” Marasi said.

“Steal the other fifteen,” Moonlight said. “Then I’d be able to manipulate the market however I wanted.”

“Ruthless.”

“Not as ruthless as other options. These pieces of art exist, Marasi, and your planet’s god holds two of them.”

“Ruin and Preservation.”

“Indeed. That makes Harmony the most valuable—the most Invested—being in the cosmere. One of the other sixteen decided the best way to improve *his* stock was to try to destroy all the others. He managed it in a few cases.”

“And … is that Trell?”

Moonlight shook her head. “No, his name is Odium. Trell—Autonomy—had a different idea. You see these buildings? These houses? All pieces of a larger art installation. The grand creation is impressive, but it’s not yours. This kind of pattern, and those straight lines, those reflective panels … that’s from a Taldain movement known as brutalism.

“That’s part of what I hate about Autonomy. She claims she wants everyone to be individual. Gives them each a little house that is distinctive from the others, but only in a way that fits *her* plan, *her* desires. It’s fake individualism. A corporate uniqueness. Like an advertisement telling people to go their own way, be their own person—by buying this product like everyone else.”

Marasi struggled to parse all of this. But what she understood reinforced what she had suspected. A being from another planet was leading this city, and had plans for the people of Marasi’s world.

“What is Trell’s goal, then?” Marasi asked. “If he doesn’t want to destroy the other gods?”

“Trell is trying to edge out the others,” Moonlight said. “She—he, they, it varies—doesn’t like engaging other gods directly. We call them Shards, by the way. Autonomy is trying to outcompete the others by filling the cosmere with versions of herself. Crowd out the competition, so to speak. Like an extremely invasive plant moving into another ecosystem and strangling the local varieties.”

Marasi frowned. “I … think I understand.”

“Conversations about Autonomy can be confusing,” Moonlight said, her eyes on the road. “Trellism is the remnants of an ancient religion on your world, originally founded by Autonomy long, long ago. A seed for when she decided to move in. Now, that time has come. Autonomy is looking for someone on this planet to fully take up that role, that identity.”

“Wait, *take up* that role?”

“She wants to leave a god behind on this planet,” Moonlight explained. “Someone who bears some of her power, who sees to her interests, and is—in many ways—a piece of her soul. She does this all around the cosmere. Some worlds have entire pantheons that are all versions of her, each of which has a distinct personality and identity.”

“So … she’s role-playing? With herself?”

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “But Autonomy’s Investiture has a life of its own, and so each version of her becomes its own thing over time. Sometimes they aren’t a person but only power. Other times, if the situation needs more oversight, she picks someone to elevate.”

“So…” Marasi said, “she’s going to take our world by setting up a rival god and forcing Harmony out?”

“Basically,” Moonlight said. “Your planet is a primary target for her, Marasi. Two Shards in residence, held by one person, frightens her. You had gunpowder weapons and electricity before any planet in the cosmere aside from her core homeworld. She sees you getting stronger, learning more and more. Getting close to real secrets. It makes you the biggest threat in the cosmere, at least to her.”

“I don’t see how this could defeat Harmony though.”

"I don't either, honestly," Moonlight said. "I'm not sure any human can understand the full plan. But she knows Harmony has trouble acting, and so she has seen an opportunity."

Marasi sat back, breathing out, her hand slipping from her gun. Answers. *Actual* answers. She'd been searching for so long, hit so many dead ends. To finally get an explanation felt … wonderful.

"So Autonomy is looking for an avatar," Marasi said.

"She's likely found one. A woman named Telsin."

"Wax's *sister*?" Damn.

"Granted, there's rivalry among the ranks," Moonlight said. "There always is, with Autonomy. So Telsin will have to prove she's the strongest, the best. And, since creativity and individualism are Autonomy's stated intents, she'll reward grit, success, vision."

Moonlight nodded to the half-finished buildings they were passing. "This city is an example of that, all designed by one gifted architect Telsin promoted five years ago. His work is meant to impress Autonomy … but the individual homeowners? They don't get to design anything. They get a manufactured 'individual' house."

"Seems like a raw deal," Marasi said.

"Depends on what you want," Moonlight said. "Living under her can be safe if you keep your head down, don't stray into the dangerous regions where she demands that you test yourself. Autonomy is brutal, but also generous. If you impress her, you rise through her ranks. Even if you go *against* what you're told, and you are successful, you are rewarded."

"And if you fail?"

"It doesn't go well for you," Moonlight said. Her eyes grew distant. "She sickens me. But I do understand her … I think. It's taken a while."

Marasi sat back in her seat, thoughtful. Answers, finally. But at the same time … how much could she trust this woman? Was any of this true?

"Why explain this to me now?" Marasi asked.

"Because you've impressed my organization," Moonlight said. "We who defend Scadrial have to move very carefully; there are forces in this world—Harmony included—that might crush us, if we take the wrong step."

That gave Marasi pause. If they didn't work for Harmony, who *did* they work for?

Moonlight led the truck caravan off the highway at last, passing through the outskirts of the city on the northern edge.

"It's so … fabricated," Moonlight said. "Look at that sign. You see it?"

"The billboard?" Marasi said, glancing at the large posted drawing of a stylized version of Bilming, with light rising behind it. PRIDE IN PROGRESS, it said. OUTER CITIES SELF-RELIANCE MOVEMENT.

"Those are all over the city," Moonlight said. "Nights! The same exact piece of art, a hundred times over. Art that can be reproduced … is it really art at all?"

"Of course it is," Marasi said. "Why would it stop being art just because it's replicated?"

"It's crass."

"Said like an elitist," Marasi said. "If you truly were interested in the *beauty* of the art—instead of some tangential sense of control—you'd want everyone to be able to experience it. The more the better."

"Well argued," Moonlight said. "I'll admit that my distaste for Autonomy might taint my opinion."

They led the convoy onto Biggle Way, then drove slowly in a single-file line. Eventually someone fell into step alongside Marasi's truck, wearing a red jacket as the notebook said. She unlatched the window again.

"Ahead, across the Grand Motorway," he said. "Third building on the right."

She nodded and put the window back up. At the end of the street, they reached the Grand Motorway—a vast *six-lane* highway. Marasi had never seen a street so wide. "Are there really so many cars these days that such a thing is necessary?"

"They're planning," Moonlight said, "for a much larger city in the future."

Well, they might not need that many lanes yet, but there was still plenty of traffic on the Grand Motorway. They had to wait for traffic to slow and give them a chance to cross. Ahead she could see a line of large warehouses—the third one's cargo door was open. That was it, their drop-off.

“Are you going to interfere?” Marasi asked. “With our operation?”

“No,” Moonlight said. “You have my word.”

“Can I talk to you afterward?” Marasi asked.

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “But Marasi, I can only say so much to an outsider. For now I’m just here to watch.”

At a lull in the traffic, Moonlight pulled across—though the other nine trucks had to wait their turn.

“And what if bullets start flying?” Marasi asked. “You’re going to sit here and watch?”

“I’m not a constable, as you pointed out,” Moonlight said. “So yes. Consider me an external admirer of your work. Interested in the quirks of those who follow the law—and their … *value*.”

She smiled in a knowing way, then pulled into the cavernous warehouse. As soon as all ten trucks arrived, the sting could begin.

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Wayne nodded as the trucks ahead waited to cross the highway. “Well then, Hoid,” he said to the coachman, “that’s all I know about how to pickle vegetables.”

“… Thank you?” Hoid said.

“’S all right,” Wayne said. “I’m a bastion of useful information, I am.”

The truck ahead of them pulled forward, crossing the vast motorway filled with sixteens upon sixteens of cars. Hoid moved their truck up, next in line.

“Can I have my harmonica back now?” Hoid asked.

Wayne fished in his pocket and brought it out. “I traded you fair for this!”

“You did nothing of the sort.”

“I did!” Wayne said. “The trade is in the glove box. You’re always too watchy for me to slip things in your pocket. How’d you get so good at that, anyways? You’re a rusting coachman.”

“Practice,” Hoid said solemnly. “A very *great* amount of practice.” He opened the glove box, and a bright white creature with a long, hairless tail peeked out. “Wayne. A *live rat*?”

“I call him Sir Squeekins,” Wayne said. “I wasn’t gonna bring him, but he snuck into my pocket, he did. So I figure, ‘That’s the seventeenth time you’ve let him escape his cage, Wayne. Better give him to someone responsible.’”

“You are a uniquely bizarre individual,” Hoid said, smiling as the rat crawled up his arm. “But … trade accepted, I guess?”

“Great, great,” Wayne replied. “He likes strawberries and booze, but don’t give him none of the booze, ’cuz he’s a rat.”

“Noted.”

They waited at the edge of the wide roadway. And Wayne, he’d had this feeling all day today. Something was happening. Something important.

“You ever feel,” Wayne said, “like you wish life was like the stories?”

“What do you mean?” Hoid asked.

“There’s always a good ending in those stories. The ones my ma used to tell … they *meant* something. People, they were *worth* something.”

“I think we live stories every day,” Hoid replied. “Ones that we will remember, and tell, and shape like clay to be what we need them to be.”

“The last story my ma told me,” Wayne said, “was about a lawman. Funny, huh? That I’d end up becoming one. Except he was a hero. And I’m … well, I’m me.”

“You do yourself a disservice, Master Wayne,” Hoid said softly.

“Can’t be no hero if you were a villain, Hoid.”

“But in most of the stories, it is the villain who knows the hero best.”

Wayne chewed on that, watching the flow of cars on the road ahead. And … found himself imagining that roadway as a river. Because a part of him wished that what Hoid said could be true.

Then he waited some more.

And some more.

Damn. Someone really ought to come up with a way to make it so cars that wanted to cross had a better chance. Maybe you could hire someone to stand at the corner and fire a gun in the air when too many cars were blocking the way, and frighten them to move faster? Anyway, that zooming of cars … that road could be a wide river. Yeah, a river of stone and steel. Faster than any other river in the world.

He smiled, remembering a calm, beautiful voice that had kept his world solid for so long.

Yeah, there’s a bandit to be chased, he thought. *But it’s still wrong. Where’s the hero? He should be here, but he stayed behind.*

In a lull, Hoid gunned the truck and they scooted across—earning only three honks from cars that had to slow. Pretty good, considering. You could cross even the fastest river, full of the worst kinds of rocks, if you were in a bigger rock yourself. No need to fly, like Jak had in the story. This wasn't cheating. It was just a smarter way, it was.

Followed by the last of their convoy, they pulled into the dim warehouse lit by some unlatched windows up along the tops of the walls. Why put the windows up there, where nobody could see outta them?

Oh, right. Illegal stuff. Yeah, that made sense.

"Thanks for the ride, Hoid," Wayne said, pulling out his gangster hat—a worn wool cap traded off one of the thugs they'd caught. "You might wanna keep your head down if this next part gets shooty. Hope it won't though."

"Understood, Master Wayne," Hoid said. "Best of luck."

Wayne nodded, and it was time to become someone else. He scrunched up his face, squinting like Franis did—that was the guy he'd gotten the hat off of. A fellow Wayne's height and age, but more weathered. By time, by smokes, by the things he'd done. Wayne already wore a wig to change his hair color, along with a bit of rubber on his chin to square it out, and some makeup to sink his eyes. With the hat, he *was* Franis—missing only one thing.

He climbed out and swaggered. Franis sure knew how to swagger.

VenDell—wearing the Cycle's body, a man named Granks—met him outside the truck. The others waited quietly. All those dirty conners in the trucks would jump out only when they had someone important to catch. Someone more than a bunch of useless, low-level cretins.

Not that Franis was a cretin. He just needed work, you know? You started by taking a job at the docks, but work there grew tight. And the schedules were so bad. Then you heard your friend Vin had a job with someone who paid better, and all you had to do was move some boxes. Who could get into trouble for moving boxes? Even if you did have to keep a gun on you at all times, and be ready to shoot.

He swaggered in beside VenDell in his fancy suit and fancier body. "It's uncanny," the kandra said, "how you do that. You imitate a person nearly as well as one of my kin."

"Just gotta find someone what looks a little like you," Wayne said, "and make up the difference. Also, stay in character."

"Right, right," the kandra said. He wasn't half bad—considering what a fussy little thing he normally was. He wore Granks's body well. A gangster who had proven himself enough to be elevated. Given a title and some authority, while the rest of them were basically hired hands.

They crossed the vast chamber toward two fellows who emerged from the perimeter. Indeed, a lot of fellows began moving in. A good forty armed men. A local gang. That was … more people than the constables had.

We'll have surprise though, Wayne thought. And the trucks were armored, offering cover. It should be fine, with Wayne and Marasi—not to mention a Faceless Immortal—on their side. MeLaan was quite the fighter; VenDell should be handy in a scrap too.

The two fellows that stepped up to meet with them wore work clothing: suspenders, trousers, buttoned shirts. Not good enough. They needed at least a Suit—the rank that Granks would report to—and preferably a Sequence, or even a fully promoted Series. There were only a couple of those in the Set at a time though. And one leader. The Key.

Wayne/Franis didn't want any of those important jobs. He wasn't interested in wearing the fancy clothing and drawing the gunfire. Pay him his wages and let him pretend he wasn't doing nothing wrong.

"Cycle," said the stouter of the two men, nodding. He would *probably* be a fellow named Dip, according to the interrogations. Or … maybe he was one named Embrier.

Whoever he was, he glanced at Franis, but didn't say anything to him directly. "You can leave the trucks," he told VenDell. "Gather your men in the two vans outside and head home. Your success has been noted."

"Fine," VenDell grumbled—using a pretty good version of Granks's accent. "But I need to talk to the Sequence. There's an issue."

"The radio line isn't good enough?" maybe-Dip said, glancing at his companion.

"I have reason to believe the radios are compromised," VenDell said. "The Sequence is here, isn't he?"

That was Wayne's suggestion. The leader types, they *always* hung around and watched. Didn't trust good, honest(ish) thieves like Franis to do their job right. So yeah, a higher-level member of the Set would be here. Somewhere. Sure as Franis wasn't Franis right now, but was somebody kind of close—as close as someone could get, unless he could wear Franis's bones, which was cheatin' and that was that.

Anyway. Important negotiations. Life or death. Surrounded by forty armed men. Better pay attention.

"I will convey your message to the Sequence," maybe-Dip said.

"That won't be good enough," VenDell said. "There is a problem. A very large problem."

The two thugs looked at one another. Damn … they were suspicious.

Wayne glanced at the people at the perimeter, who would need only one offhand comment to start shooting. So he made a quick decision. The fellow wouldn't be the one named Dip. Because who would put a guy named Dip in charge of anything?

"Hey, Embrier," he said, using a slightly modified version of his own accent—dockworker, but overlaid with the kind of sniveling accent these thugs had all adopted. People what worked together, they started to pick up one another's ways of speaking. "Can we talk a spell?"

The stout man glanced at him, then nodded. "Yeah, Franis?"

Wayne waved him over, and they slipped to the side. VenDell started up a conversation with the other man, going over the inventory they'd been able to "acquire."

"What's up, Franis?" the thug said quietly, then thumbed over his shoulder. "The Cycle *never* cares about things like this. Just does what he's told."

"Brain like wet concrete," Wayne agreed softly. "Can you *believe* he's the one what got chosen?"

"I can believe it," Embrier said. "He never questions. Unlike you."

"Hey," Wayne said, "I only question when my paycheck is coming."

"Don't we all," Embrier said, then shot him a sideways glance. "You've been getting some sun."

Damn. The makeup hadn't been light enough. Could he get the man to ask after his father? Wayne had some good info from the real Franis on his father. "You know. Heavy work. Like Dad always said—best work is the kind you do with your arms and back."

"Yeah, but don't you live in a cavern?"

"I don't *live* in the rusting *cavern,*" Wayne said. "What, you think I stay down there in the dark?"

Embrier grunted. "How's your sister?"

Sister? Aw, rusts. Wayne glanced at Embrier. That smile.

"You stay away from my damn sister," Wayne said.

"Just askin'," Embrier said, raising his hands. "Ruin. No need to come out swinging."

"Look," Wayne said softly, "Cycle isn't acting strange—he's worried. Saw some lady conner sniffing around our base. Dark hair. You know the one?"

The man cursed under his breath. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I just rusting did. But Cycle wants to report it. Thinks he'll get … you-know-who's attention. For spotting a conner what we *know* is likely to be around. Rusting idiot."

But Embrier had gone a little pale at the implication that the Cycle wanted to draw Trell's attention. Best to … ease away from that. Wayne threw his arm around the fellow's shoulder and walked them back toward the others.

"'Sides," he said to Embrier. "You can forget my sister. I've met this woman, she'd be great for you."

"Really?" Embrier asked.

"Sure. She thought *Yulip* was handsome."

"Yulip? The koloss-blooded who looks like a *frog*?"

"Same one," Wayne said, rejoining the others.

Embrier shook his head. "Insanity." He nodded to VenDell. "I'll go get the Sequence. You can start your men unloading."

VenDell turned, waving for the process to begin. Hopefully Marasi would keep her head down, like Wayne had told her. She was too damn obvious, that one. Needed to learn how to scrunch her face up and become someone she wasn't, once in a while. Really helped with the self-loathing.

Still shouldn't have crossed the river without the hero, Wayne thought as the two thugs jogged to the rear of the room and opened a door.

"Seriously," VenDell asked Wayne, "how do you *do* that? You don't even have their bones."

"Gotta have fewer sticks up your posterior, VenDell," Wayne said. "Yank one or two out, and you'll see."

"It's patently unfair," he said. "A mortal should *not* be able to stand beside one of the Bearers of the Contract and seem a fair match to their skill in imitation."

"Aw, jealousy," Wayne said. He breathed it in. "Smells like cherry blossoms. Also, stop breakin' character, ya sod."

Finally, two figures in nicer clothing stepped from a darkened room at the back of the warehouse. Perfect. That was what they'd wanted. Hopefully the waiting constables could—

Suddenly, the outer doors slammed open and figures in brown began flooding in, pointing guns at the thugs. "Drop your weapons!" a voice shouted. "This is a sting!"

"It's the heat!" Wayne said, slipping his gun out of his holster.

VenDell grabbed his arm.

"Oh yeah," Wayne said, letting his arm be lowered. "Right, right. I forget sometimes…"

But these weren't *their* people. What the hell? All around, the thugs were turning—but nobody fired, because more and more figures in brown were pouring in. At least a hundred constables. Wearing …

… the shield and tortoise, symbol of *Bilming.* These were local constables.

Marasi's sting had just been stung.

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Marasi groaned and sat up in her seat, pulling off the hat she'd used to obscure her face.

Bilming city constables. Wonderful. She glanced at Moonlight, who shrugged.

"I had no idea," Moonlight said.

Marasi sighed. At least the locals knew to surround the Sequence and his flunky—a pack of at least twenty constables were holding weapons on him. They might not know about the Set, but they understood things like smuggling and gangsters. The rest of the newly arrived constables were rounding up thugs who had wisely decided not to shoot, as they were far outnumbered. They reluctantly dropped their weapons.

Marasi kicked open her door and hopped down. Immediately, several of the advancing constables turned weapons on her. She sighed and raised her hands. "I'm Elendel Constabulary!" she shouted at them. "Special Detective Marasi Colms!"

"What's this?" a voice demanded. A tall woman with short blonde hair—wearing a Bilming uniform—pushed through the constables. Marasi thought she knew the woman.

"Captain Blantach?" Marasi said. "We met at the intercity training event last year."

The woman looked Marasi up and down, then groaned. Nearby, some of Marasi's people were hesitantly climbing out of the backs of trucks—showing their credentials.

Captain Blantach put her palm to her forehead. “You’re *kidding* me,” she said. “You’re running a sting *inside* my city?”

“I have jurisdiction in the entire Basin,” Marasi said, fishing for the paperwork. “Constable-General Reddi authorized it under the oversight of the governor.”

“You *claim* jurisdiction in the entire Basin!” Blantach said, waving the authorizations away. “Rusting Elenders. *Of course* you would pull an operation in my city and not even *send word*.”

Marasi felt a little bad for the woman. Still, the Set had the Outer Cities under its thumb. Sending advance word to the local constables would have been far too risky; there were almost certainly Set agents within Blantach’s organization.

Though … the fact that the constables were here seemed to disprove that theory.

“You’re going to need to turn them over to us,” Marasi said, waving at the gangsters.

“Like hell we are,” Blantach said, folding her arms across her uniform jacket, stiff and buttoned tight.

“This is part of a much bigger network,” Marasi said.

“Then we’ll discover that during interrogation.”

Marasi sighed, but took a deep breath. “Blantach,” she said, “do we *have* to fight this fight?”

The taller woman eyed her, but said nothing.

“The politicians don’t get along,” Marasi said, “but that’s their business. *Our* business is protecting the cities—all of them. Just a couple of conners with our hands full. Let’s work together rather than squabble.”

“Perhaps I can agree to that … if we do it on *my* terms.”

“This thing I’m hunting,” Marasi said, “it goes deep. Dangerously deep. And it has little tendrils of mist wrapping around all parts of society. Your city’s leaders are *almost certainly* compromised.”

“You said this wasn’t about politics.”

“I said we shouldn’t worry about how divisive the politicians are being,” Marasi said. “But everything touches on politics these days. The group I’m pursuing are deliberately stoking war between Elendel and the Outer Cities.

"If we get close to them, there are elements in *both* governments who are going to try to stop us. Which is why I couldn't warn you we were coming. I apologize for that, but most in my *own* government don't know about this operation."

Blantach waved away an aide who came trotting up, perhaps to deliver a count of enemies taken captive, and continued to regard Marasi. This situation was a bit like a political negotiation—but Marasi had an advantage over Steris and Wax. You never really could tell what senators wanted. But fellow constables?

You didn't take up this job for glory—or at least you didn't *stay* in this job for glory. Anyone who wanted glory quickly moved on to judgeships or attorney positions, promoted away from actual detective work as soon as possible. But Blantach was a career constable. She'd been in her job longer than Reddi.

"You're making me worried, Colms," Blantach said.

"How hard was this operation to organize?" Marasi asked. "Were those in your own government—higher members of the constabulary—working against you?"

"That's how everything is." Blantach shrugged. "You know red tape. It…" She trailed off, frowning. "There might have been a *tad* more on this mission."

"So why didn't they quash it entirely?" Marasi whispered. "Why'd they let you continue?"

"I was determined."

That wasn't it. If the Set had known about this mission, and had been intent on quashing it, they would have.

The weapons were being smuggled here to arm the forces in Bilming anyway, Marasi realized. *So it's fine if the government seizes them. They'll still go where they need to.* The Set had to run a delicate operation. They might be in control of Bilming, but most people didn't know that. So why tip their hand and prevent a raid, when all the Set needed to do was make sure the seized goods went to the right places in the city?

And what of the Sequence? Marasi glanced at the pile of constables surrounding him. He'd been bound, but maintained an air of confidence. He had a refined look, a stylish suit. Thick eyebrows and prominent lips. Her guess was that he had been aware of the sting and was playing along, knowing he'd be released later.

Then he saw Marasi. And he cocked his head, frowning. He stepped closer and had to be restrained by the constables—as if he'd forgotten about them. He stared at her, confused.

A moment later he smiled a broad, even excited smile. He flexed, then stretched his neck.

Rusts. What was she missing?

Oh *hell.* What better way to spark further controversy in the Basin than to suddenly find a bunch of Elendel constables interfering in local business? Particularly if …

"Blantach," Marasi said, grabbing her arm, "we have to sedate that man."

"What? *Sedate* him? Why?"

"Aren't you ready for Metalborn?" Marasi said.

"There aren't any Metalborn in this group," Blantach said. "I have it on good authority from—"

The Sequence chose that moment to let out an Allomantic Push of *incredible* strength.

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Marasi wore a breakaway gunbelt with metal pouches, so the Push didn’t do more than strip away her equipment. The Bilming constables weren’t so well prepared. They were tossed back by their own guns, handcuffs, and other accoutrements of their profession.

Blantach screamed as she was knocked off her feet, but she was lucky to suffer only a minor fall—many were tossed dozens of feet. *Trucks* rocked, and two even overturned. The doors at the sides of the building were blown free. Windows cracked and people cried out as guns were shoved across the floor and hit the walls—except for a few unaffected weapons that lay on the ground. Apparently some of the enemy had been given aluminum guns.

The Sequence casually scooped one of these up, now standing at the epicenter of a blast of power unlike any Marasi had experienced from an ordinary Coinshot. She stepped back, awed. That had been something like … like from the old stories. Like Harmony had recorded in the histories, detailing the power available to the Ascendant Warrior.

It was a horrible sign. Because Marasi realized why the Sequence was smiling. While he’d likely been planning to go along with his arrest, now that he’d found a chance to implicate Elendel in a scandal, he would want to cause as many casualties as possible.

While the others were recovering, Marasi dove for one of the aluminum guns. But the Sequence took aim and fired directly in front of her, driving her—still unarmed—into cover behind an overturned truck. The Allomantic Push had stopped for now, fortunately.

You've read about this, she thought. *It's one of the ancient powers available only to Mistborn.*

It was called duralumin, an arcane metal. Using it, an Allomancer could burn their entire metal reserve at once. Like detonating a keg of gunpowder instead of a single bullet, it released an enormous burst of Allomantic energy. At least … that was what she remembered. It hadn't been relevant in centuries, because no one could have two Allomantic powers at once.

Unless you had Hemalurgic spikes.

A figure in a wool cap and wig scrambled up beside her a moment later. Wayne was followed by VenDell in the broad-chested Cycle's body. A second later Wayne's speed bubble gave the three of them some breathing room.

"They were ready for us!" Wayne said. "They knew we was going to pull this sting!"

"No," Marasi said. "They knew about Blantach and *her* constables, but I think they didn't mind being captured. My guess is they were going to go along with *that* sting, and slip out of jail later."

"So what changed?" he asked.

"The Sequence just realized we're here from Elendel," Marasi said, "and decided to use our presence to create an incident—constables dead—and blame it on Elendel interference in a Bilming operation."

It was still merely a guess. The facts were clear though. The moment he saw Marasi, a man who had been about to go quietly had decided to fight. Which put everyone in danger.

She glanced out from behind the truck, now that she didn't have to worry about getting shot. The Sequence was casually pointing his gun toward Captain Blantach, who was climbing to her feet. At the perimeter of the room, constables and gangsters alike were picking themselves up off the ground, disoriented. Those who had recovered first were frozen in the act of scrambling for weapons.

"What's the plan?" Wayne asked.

"You distract that Sequence," Marasi said to him. "I'll organize our constables. The Set's forces seem surprised by that too—look at the shock on their faces. I really think they planned to be captured, then released by corrupt judges or prosecutors. We still have a chance to turn this around, if we can take advantage of their disorientation.”

“This is *not* the plan!” VenDell said, peeking past her.

“Plans last until someone starts shootin’, mate,” Wayne said.

“So unruly,” VenDell muttered. “All these beautiful bones are going to get crushed.”

“Not if we can stop it,” Marasi said. “Help Wayne with that Sequence and take down any armed enemies you see. Be careful of our drivers—they’re out of uniform but all wearing white shoes.”

“Um…” VenDell said. “My. Hmm … When you say, ‘take down,’ what precisely do you mean, Miss Colms?”

“Kill?” Marasi said. “Shoot? Maim? Eat? I’m not picky, VenDell.”

“Ah, yes, er,” he said. “You see, I am *not* much of a fighter. I’m a connoisseur. A good planner. A bearer of deep and important thoughts.”

She glared at him.

“I follow the First Contract, Miss Colms,” he said. “Like almost all kandra. I cannot kill, or even hurt, a living creature. *Particularly* not a human being.”

“MeLaan never had that trouble,” Wayne said.

“MeLaan is a miscreant!” VenDell said. “Why do you think she was assigned to you? Only she and TenSoon are capable fighters; the rest of us abhor it! I should, er, get away. And plan. Yes, plan how to respond.”

Marasi glanced at Wayne, who was rolling his eyes.

“You’re basically indestructible, right?” she said to VenDell. “Like MeLaan?”

“Well, technically. But you see, I—”

“Then get out there,” Marasi said, “and draw some fire. Also, if you can manage it, toss me one of those aluminum guns.”

“Very well,” he said with a deep sigh. “This is the last time I let Harmony convince me—”

He broke off as a short woman rounded the back of the truck, somehow moving at their speed—and then she stepped *into* their speed bubble.

The stout woman wore a bowler hat and held a dueling cane in one hand. “’Ello, lovelies,” she said. “What’re we doin’? Havin’ a meetin’? I like meetin' new folks. Killin' *them* breaks the monotony." She grinned, then leaped for Marasi.

It was such an incongruous experience—no one had *ever* violated one of Wayne's bubbles—that Marasi reacted with embarrassing slowness. Wayne wasn't so inhibited. He grabbed the woman by the arm as she swung, preventing the dueling cane from connecting with Marasi's head.

All three of them fell in a jumble. Wayne ended up with the dueling cane, but the woman scrambled away. She became a blur for a second as she hit the edge of the speed bubble—and then she was crossing the room at normal human speed. A moment later she froze in place, moving sluggishly.

"Damn!" Wayne said. "Another Slider!"

Of course. Someone with Wayne's same power—she could create her own speed bubbles. When she'd moved quickly for a moment, it was because her speed bubble had overlapped with Wayne's, doubling her speed for a split second. But she'd been forced to drop her bubble to keep moving through the room, as Sliders had to take brief breaks in using their powers.

"Wayne," Marasi said, "new plan. I'm going to try to grab my Allomantic grenades. They broke free during that blast earlier. You need to stop the strange version of yourself."

"What?" he demanded. "Because she's a Slider, she's a strange version of me?"

"I agree," VenDell said. "Wayne is already incredibly strange—so a strange version of him would be normal."

"It doesn't matter!" Marasi snapped. "Wayne, deal with the Slider. VenDell, distract the Coinshot. Ready?"

"Ready," Wayne said.

"Not ready!" VenDell said.

"Drop the bubble!" Marasi said, already leaping forward.

Wayne complied, and the sound of the room hit her in a cacophony. Men scrambling for weapons and starting to fire. Screams and shouts of pain. Constables trying to organize themselves—a dozen different voices giving conflicting orders.

Marasi tackled Captain Blantach—who had barely reached her feet—pushing her behind another of the trucks. The Sequence's shots hit the floor, tossing up chips of concrete, barely missing the woman.

Blantach scrambled to her feet in surprise, then nodded in thanks to Marasi, who already had her back to the truck. It was the one she'd ridden into the building—but Moonlight was nowhere to be seen.

Wayne tackled the Slider a moment later. VenDell hopped out from behind the fallen truck and began waving his hands. "Look at me! Defenseless! And a traitor! Ha! I'm going to tell the constables everything!"

He took a shot straight to the head.

"Rusts!" Captain Blantach shouted, finally putting it all together. "They have an *Allomancer*!"

Marasi sighed. "Can you organize a resistance, Captain!" she shouted over the increasing din. "The weapons at the top of each box in these trucks are real, and all of the vehicles are plated to provide cover!"

"Right, then," Blantach said, turning and waving toward the eastern wall of the room. "Constables! To me! We—"

The truck they were hiding behind lurched. Marasi barely leaped away in time as a *second* powerful Steelpush shook the room. The warehouse walls rattled, wood breaking and nails ripping free. Men and women who had found weapons were again shoved backward.

And the truck Marasi had been using for cover was *thrown* away like it had been drop-kicked. It crashed out onto the street, tumbling end over end, spilling boxes that shattered into weapons. Rusts!

It narrowly missed Blantach, who had already been on the move toward the snarl of constables and thugs. Many of them had been knocked to the ground.

Now that Marasi's cover was gone, she saw the Sequence shake an aluminum flask, then unscrew it and take a drink. *More metals,* Marasi realized. If she remembered correctly, every time the Sequence used duralumin he would need to restore his reserves.

As the Sequence finished drinking, a figure with a bullet hole in the forehead tackled him. VenDell was, at the very least, trying.

"Organize the constables!" Marasi shouted to Blantach, then ran for the gaping open front of the warehouse. Somewhere in the debris was her metals belt—with her grenades. Those had to be her best chance at stopping a superpowered Allomancer.

On her way, she passed an incredible sight: Wayne and the other Slider fighting.

Wayne leaped toward the Slider in a sudden burst of speed—but dropped his bubble in midair. She tossed hers up, catching them both, and the two became a blur of swinging dueling canes and frantic motion. The speed bubble dropped and they split apart, rounding each other—before speeding up and clashing again, so fast that Marasi couldn't even make out their blurs.

Rusts. *Stay focused,* Marasi thought. She dodged out of the front of the warehouse and scanned the debris—ignoring the sorry truck that lay upside down nearby, one tire spinning.

There, she thought, leaping to grab her metals belt, which was peeking from beneath a broken box. She yanked it out and fished inside a pouch, but the latch had broken open and two of the grenades had spilled free. She only had one.

A floppy body flew past and slammed into the overturned truck. It slumped and hit the ground, then rolled a mangled face toward her on a broken neck. "I have been defeated," VenDell said, words slurred by the broken jaw. "I am billing you for these bones."

"Don't be a baby," she said, and immediately started burning cadmium. The box buzzed in her fingers, charging up.

She dashed into the room to find that Blantach had gathered a group of constables—both Marasi's and her own—behind the cover of several overturned trucks. Many of the gangsters were grouped at the rear of the chamber near the Sequence. They were arming themselves with weapons from the back rooms, it seemed, and others were pulling out riot shields.

Wayne and his foe were still blurs. The Sequence had risen into the air, hovering on a Steelpush. Bullets bent around him, striking the wall, unable to hit directly. Rusts. If he could do that, he was far more experienced with his powers than the Cycle Marasi had fought. At least he couldn't do those mega-Pushes without harming his own people.

Marasi dashed in, low, and crouched up against one of the overturned trucks. She set the timer on her grenade and watched for a moment when the Sequence was turned. Hopefully he'd rely upon his powers to deflect bullets, and wouldn't see her grenade.

Unfortunately, the Sequence glanced in her direction as she hurled the grenade. He barely managed to Push it away, and it detonated near the far wall, not catching anyone. He caught her eye from up there, then shot a coin her direction. She barely ducked under cover in time. Rusts. He could move this truck at any moment.

No, she thought. *He'd need an anchor as heavy.* That was why the Sequence had been doing those powerful, all-direction Pushes. He could Push with equal force in every direction and stabilize himself. He couldn't move a specific truck unless he could Push *backward* against something equally heavy.

That was little comfort when a count of her people showed many bleeding as they hid behind cover. Several were down, immobile. Plus, their enemy was regrouping … it gave her a bad feeling. What kind of gangsters tried to *outgun* the constables?

The kind who are heavily armed, Marasi thought. *And think they can win. We shouldn't be fighting. Not this way.*

Gunshots echoed in the room, and bullets *banged* on metal and stone.

"We have to retreat," she said. She signaled to Kellen, one of her lieutenants. "We need to set up covering fire and organize a retreat! We're out through that opening."

"Retreat?" Kellen said, sliding closer. "But the enemy!"

"We're officers of the law," Marasi said, "not soldiers. I'm not going to perpetuate a full-on battle in the middle of a city! Mission is a bust. Time to get out."

Kellen thought for a moment, then nodded. "You're right," the woman said. "What do you want from me?"

"Gather the others and help the wounded. I'll coordinate with the Bilming group, then set up a distraction. Which truck has the real explosives?"

"Number six!"

“Wayne’s? Who decided *that*?”

“Ruin, apparently,” Kellen said. “Hadn’t thought about it myself.”

They broke. Marasi slipped her handgun from the holster on her metals belt, then dodged across the open space to truck number six, where Blantach was taking shelter. Remarkably it hadn’t been toppled, though Marasi didn’t think trying to drive out would be wise. Not when the Sequence had the power to overturn vehicles.

“We’re going to retreat,” Marasi said to Blantach. “You with us?”

“Rusts *yes*,” Blantach said. “I feel like I opened a picnic basket and found a nest of hornets. Who *are* these people?”

“They’re the ones trying to undermine our civilization,” Marasi said. She slapped the truck. “We have explosives inside this one. I’m going to toss some at the enemy to cover our retreat.”

“Give me a minute,” Blantach said. “I’ll get my people ready to join you. We have wounded.”

“So do we,” Marasi said. “Hopefully the explosion will give us enough time.”

Marasi took a deep breath, then pulled open the door of the truck and scrambled inside. There she was able to open the panel between the cab and the cargo area and slip into the back. It was dark in here, but she knew the box with the explosives would be at the rear—ready to show off on delivery.

She located a few conventional grenades by touch inside the box. And what she hoped was a firebomb, which would be clay and liquid, immune to Pushes.

Worries chased her as she squeezed back into the cab, then ducked low, counting on the plating in the passenger door to protect her from gunfire. The more she considered it, the worse she liked their position.

If we run, he’ll do another of those powerful all-out Pushes, she thought. *We’ll be ducking out the doors while trucks roll over us.*

But what else could she do? She slipped out of the truck with her explosives. Kellen and Blantach nodded to her, ready for the retreat. The warehouse was alive with gunfire, but on their side it was only a few constables keeping the enemy distracted while the rest helped the wounded.

Time for—

The Sequence dropped from the air, landing directly in the middle of the four trucks they were using as cover. Then he Pushed—two trucks on each side—shoving the vehicles out of the way with an incredible Steelpush.

In an instant, their cover was gone. The collection of beleaguered constables found themselves completely exposed, hauling the wounded to their feet. At the other end of the room, the gangsters had built a little fortification out of sandbags—and now one of them snapped a large multi-barrel rotating machine gun onto a tripod. Military grade, liquid cooled and chain fed, with bullets longer than a person's palm. Those had been developed in case of a Malwish invasion, and were illegal to smuggle out of Elendel.

The full extent of how outgunned they were struck Marasi right then. The room fell strangely silent, though she thought she heard glass shatter somewhere. A part of her mind registered the sound, but she focused on that machine gun. She stood at the head of the constables, staring directly at the barrel. Realizing what was about to happen.

She'd brought barely armed police to a battlefield.

The machine gun started up with a ripping percussive sound, and spat a concentrated stream of bullets straight at Marasi and the others.

Then those bullets stopped in the air.

Then immediately went soaring *backward* toward the enemy fortification, hitting sandbags and shields and making the gangsters cry out in surprise. The machine gun cut off, and the warehouse fell silent for a moment. Unnerved, Marasi glanced over her shoulder—to find Waxillium Ladrian standing just behind her, mistcoat tassels flaring as he turned and aimed a pistol right over her shoulder. He fired with a single *crack* of gunpowder.

The shot drilled straight through the viewfinder on the machine gun and sent the man who had been firing it to the ground, a bullet through the eye.

"Sorry I'm late," Wax announced to the crowd. "Had to wait for gunfire to lead me to you. Shall we carry on, then?"

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Fighting someone in a fair way was completely unfair, Wayne decided. He connected with his dueling cane—which made a nice resonant crack against the cheater’s skull. She went down, but rolled and was back up in a second, grinning as the wound on her head healed—a little trickle of blood running down her now-pristine skin.

Of course they’d given her the ability to heal. Marvelous. Just rusting marvelous.

She became a blur, and he barely erected his own speed bubble in time to catch sight of her to the left. He crossed his canes to block her strike. Then he started swinging.

He pummeled her on one side as she did the same to him on the other side. Rusting Ruin and rusting hell! That *smarted.* And it made about as much sense as drinking the expensive whiskey once you were already drunk. Both of them backed off, wincing—but tapping their metalminds to heal.

“Harmony’s holy missing bits, woman,” he said, shaking his bruised arm. “You’re annoying.”

“You’re annoying,” she said. “You’re … yoer…”

“Stop trying to get my accent!” Wayne snapped.

“Can you say ‘my’ again?” she asked, tossing her dueling cane up in a little spin and catching it.

Rusting.

Cheating.

Woman!

Wayne had gotten his powers the fair way. By being born with them through pure luck. She'd gone and stolen hers from other folks. That was *absolutely* cheating. Everybody knew there was things you could take and things you couldn't. Wax's unused pocket watch? Fair game. The watch Lessie had given him? Off-limits.

People's souls? *Way* off-limits.

The two circled one another, ignoring the rest of the chaos in the room. He did stop time as something hit near him—a bullet scraping the side of a truck—and he saw the sparks drop in slow motion. But Marasi and the conners would have to deal with the blokes with guns. Wayne had a very-much-not-at-all-clone-of-him to deal with.

She was grinning as he launched forward, swinging. Yes, she could heal if he hit her, but a person could only heal so many times before running out of stored health. He had to keep hitting and hope she ran out before he did.

She dodged away this time.

"Oi!" Wayne said. "Stand still."

"Oi…" she replied. "Oiiii…"

"Stop that!"

She danced back, smiling. "I've been waiting for this for years," she said—her accent fading away. "Planning, preparing. I was *built* for you, Wayne. Aren't you honored? I was *made* to kill *you*!"

"Ah! Do you hafta be *weird* too?"

"Once I kill you, I will wear your hat and carry your scent. It's all I'm lacking."

He stopped in place as she grinned at him. So. Rusting. Weird. She then turned, and her face fell. "What's *he* doing here?"

Wayne edged over to see what she had. And … rusts, *finally.* The hero had arrived. Wax stood there like Ruin himself, tassels swirling around him, protecting the constables and firing wantonly into the enemy ranks.

The cheater was as good as defeated, now that Wax was here. All was right in the world.

Course, Wax was busy at the moment, and would need help. So Wayne bull-rushed the cheater, rammed his elbow into her gut—and felt something sharp in her arm when he did. Her metalminds maybe? Or the spike? Well then. Now that Wax was here, they could do a Two-Faced Special. Except with only Wayne, because Wax needed to shoot some folks.

When the cheater tried to throw Wayne off, he twisted and let her lurch into position. Then he reached around from behind her, took his dueling cane in two hands, and pulled it up under her chin. With a grunt, she began battering at him, but that only threw her off balance.

In a moment Wayne had her on the ground, one knee against her back, dueling cane pulled up and choking her. He'd been in this situation himself, and it was not fun—feeling your metalminds bleed dry as you were forced to heal from suffocation.

She struggled in a frenzy. The world around them slowed and sped up in spurts as she panic-activated her powers. But for all her skill with the canes, she'd skipped basic wrestling techniques. Someone who knew what they were doing could have thrown him.

He shook his head, disappointed. "You can't skip wrestling holds, mate," he told her. "If you want to brawl properly, you've *got* to know how to win on the ground."

She responded with grunts, which was *much* better than before. He was lucky Wax had shown up. Wayne had been up against the wall before the hero arrived.

A figure in fine clothing dropped beside them. "Getruda," he said to the woman, "I'm disappointed in you." Then he pointed a gun at Wayne's head.

Right, then. Wayne let go and ducked away. He dodged into a roll—because who doesn't like a nice finishing roll—and came out of it with a speed bubble in place, sheltering him and Marasi, who had been seeing to one of the wounded.

"Hey," he said, puffing. "Things are looking up, eh?"

"We should still pull out," Marasi said. "This isn't what we're trained for."

"Shame to leave when we're winning though," Wayne said. He nodded behind him. The Sequence was pointing toward the way out—mid-order—and the cheater was on her feet, running in that direction.

“Are we?” Marasi said. She looked down at Mathingdaw—the wounded constable—who had her eyes shut tight, grimacing from the pain of a bullet hole in her leg.

“If Wax deals with that Coinshot we are,” Wayne said. The enemy ranks were in chaos as their men tried to hide.

“They have at least a few aluminum bullets,” Marasi said, pointing to the side. Indeed some bullets—moving ever so slowly through the air—were ignoring Wax’s Pushes.

“Why so few though?” Wayne said. “Miles Hundredlives had tons of aluminum equipment.”

“This group planned to be caught today,” she said. “I’m convinced of it. They were going to let Blantach’s constables take them, rather than raise suspicion by stopping the investigation.”

“That’s a leap in logic,” Wayne said. “But you’re often right about this sorta thing. They wouldn’t want much aluminum to be taken. Departments have a habit of meltin’ it down for the money.”

Wayne glanced toward Wax, who stood out in front. Frozen as he pointed with three fingers at a passing bullet. He seemed to be … guiding it to the side.

Nah. That was a bit much, even for Wax.

“My gut says,” Wayne replied, “that if we hold out this lot will scatter. See, they already got a newsworthy incident by fightin’ us, and there’s not much more to gain. But we have wounded, and it’d be tough to pull out.”

Marasi nodded. “All right then. We hold position. So long as Wax chases off that Coinshot.”

“Dropping the bubble.”

“Go.”

He dropped it. Wax continued his spin, and rusts … the bullet he’d been pointing at *seemed* to go straight for one of the gangsters trying to sneak up on the constables’ position.

“Wax!” Marasi shouted. “We can handle these. But I need that Coinshot dealt with!”

Wax glanced at her, then nodded and fired at the Coinshot, who dodged into the air. The man launched straight up and smashed through the ceiling out into the city.

Wax followed, soaring through a broken skylight.

As the two vanished, the cheater ran out the front doors. The smarter gangsters realized what was up and ducked out any way they could. Wayne leaped out in front to draw fire, and Marasi scrambled to the side of the room. He wondered why until her grenade froze a small group of enemies.

The rest of this was cleanup; the real fight had moved to the sky. *Wait*, Wayne thought. He put up a speed bubble so two nearby wounded could crawl into the back of a truck for shelter. *Did anyone warn Wax that the Coinshot can do those crazy super-Pushes?*

Hmm. Well, Wayne supposed his friend would figure it out soon enough.

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Wax darted into the air and felt a sudden moment of disconnect. He'd flown through Elendel so often that he expected to see its sights. This city—with its round layout, elevated train, and huge warships in the port—was disorienting. He had been here before, and knew about the strange design of the buildings, no two the same. But from up here, he could see they were arranged in an artistic pattern. Too orderly, too perfect, too balanced. Like a child's model of a city.

The enemy Coinshot bounded away toward the perimeter of the city, and Wax gave chase with a few Steelpushes. His opponent was talented, maybe even a true Coinshot, augmented by Hemalurgy. He expertly Pushed off the buildings they passed, when newer Coinshots always looked for anchors—like cars—directly beneath them, and forgot about those behind.

Still, Wax managed to gain on the man by anticipating where he would Push. Wax raised Vindication. He didn't want to kill the Coinshot—they needed answers—but perhaps a hit in the leg or arm would—

The man suddenly *blasted* into the air. The car below *crumpled* as if it had been stomped flat, and Wax winced for the poor people inside. The Coinshot launched high into the sky, swift as a bullet, difficult to track against the blinding sun.

Wax landed in a scramble on a nearby rooftop. Rusting *hell.* That had been …

Duralumin. Damn. It had only been a matter of time before he faced an enemy with this strength, but he'd merely read of those powers. Never faced them. This threw out Wax's every understanding of how to duel with another Coinshot. How did you fight someone who could launch himself a mile into the air with a single Push?

Same way you fight anyone, Wax thought. *With skill and wit.*

If Wax's memory was right, the man would need to drink a new vial each time he used the power. Wax made his way to another rooftop, where he'd stowed his pack before joining the fight. Here he grabbed an extra pouch of aluminum bullets and dropped the Steel Survivor, as it was loaded with conventional rounds. He raised Vindication, fully aluminum herself, and loaded with aluminum cartridges. The only other metals he had on him were the vials Harmony had sent, inside his belt sheath, which was also lined with aluminum.

He'll try to take me from above, Wax thought, scanning the sky. Sure enough, gunfire came from up there. The enemy had an aluminum weapon too, but Wax was able to leap over the side of the building to dodge. As he fell, he Pushed in through an upper window, landing in an apartment.

The room was empty. So if Wax could slide over to a window in another room, he could maybe trap the enemy by—

The entire apartment wall caved in, torn to pieces by the metal girders beneath the stonework. A wave of debris crashed into Wax and pushed him back against the far wall. He groaned, rubble tumbling around him, and caught sight of motion through the newly ripped-open wall.

The Coinshot bounded up, holding an aluminum flask for restoring metals, gun in his other hand. He'd caused a similar amount of destruction in the building across the street, which he'd used as an anchor for his terrible Push. A flask was clever; assuming he had it well saturated with his metals, he could take a swig each time he used duralumin.

Wax ducked behind some rubble as the man fired, the stone popping with sprays of white dust as bullets hit. Debris crunched underfoot and streamed off Wax's body as he took a few unaimed shots to drive the enemy away. It worked, but *Ruin.*

Wax shoved through the debris on shaky feet, stepping out into the hallway of the apartment building. He hid here for a moment, lightly burning steel to reveal sources of metal around him so he could judge the size of the rooms in the surrounding apartments. He quietly reloaded—and slipped a metal vial from his belt to quickly restore his reserves.

As aluminum had dropped in price—from extravagant to merely expensive—people had started to use it more and more. Like the sheath on Wax's belt. But that flask his enemy held, that was better. Wax's vials would be briefly vulnerable as he pulled them out to drink, whereas—

A bullet drilled through the wood of the wall and nearly hit Wax in the head. He dropped down, cursing, and waved away the confused bystanders who had begun peeking out of their apartments. Another bullet followed, again nearly hitting him. The Coinshot was firing them from outside, and Pushing them through the wood. But how was he seeing Wax? He should be invisible in here …

Idiot, Wax thought, extinguishing his steel. The enemy must have a spike that let him use bronze to sense when someone was using Allomancy nearby. Wax ducked a little farther along the hallway, and no more bullets came in through the wall. Perhaps the Coinshot would think him dead?

Assuming he's a natural Coinshot—which might be the case, given his skill—he's got one spike for bronze and one for duralumin. At least. A human body could hold up to three spikes without exposing it to Harmony's influence and direct control. But Marasi claimed the enemy had found a way to bypass that limit somehow. Perhaps it was Harmony's blindness.

People continued filling the hallway behind, despite Wax's urgings. Many gathered around the broken apartment, gawking. Too many civilians. Wax couldn't stay here. He reached the end of the hallway, opened the window with a solid kick, slipped out, and dropped—using his Feruchemy to decrease his weight so he wouldn't hit too hard.

Immediately, the enemy Coinshot appeared on a nearby roof and began shooting.

Wax scrambled around a corner and stopped filling his metalmind—which these days he wore embedded deep in his skin. A change he'd made, with the help of surgeons, after the events surrounding the Bands of Mourning. A person's body acted like aluminum, protecting things like metalminds from interference.

Then again, the stories said that with enough power, an Allomancer could ignore that. The Ascendant Warrior had done it. Rusts. At any rate, the man had appeared soon after Wax tapped a metalmind. He'd seen Wax's *Feruchemy* with his bronze, something only the very rarest of practitioners could do. How skilled was this man?

If he's watching for me to activate my abilities, Wax thought, *let's use that.*

He moved around the back of the building and found a drainage grate beside the street. Wax gave it a single flared Push, popping him up in the air, but immediately cut off to soar upward by momentum. As most Coinshots would sustain long Pushes as they flew, this single short one might make it appear that Wax was still on the ground.

The Push threw Wax up a good twenty feet, where he grabbed the side of the building just below the roof and clung to a stonework formation. He hung there, still hoping to take his opponent alive.

Feet scraped the rooftop above, and a shadow shifted. With a deep breath, Wax Pushed himself upward so he sprang up right in front of his enemy. A quick Push behind sent Wax slamming into the man, bringing them both down in a heap on the rooftop.

Using the element of surprise, Wax—kneeling on top of his enemy—punched the man's wrist to make him drop his pistol. Then he grabbed the fellow by the vest and raised his fist. By sticking close, he wouldn't have to worry about potential speed bubbles—and Wax had no Pushable metal on his person. It was possible the fellow had pewter for strength. A few punches across the face should be enough to determine that.

Wax pulled his enemy up and began laying into him. And damn, maybe he was excited to be fighting again, but the blows didn't seem to hurt Wax's knuckles as much as they once had.

The enemy scrambled for his gun in a panic, but Wax kept punching. There was a certain disorientation that struck the first time a fellow got punched, particularly in the head. It was a kind of disbelief, a stunned irreconcilability. Wax remembered his first time—the way his mind couldn't bridge its past experiences with its new painful, fist-to-face existence. The man's panic rose, and Wax realized his miscalculation a second later—as the enemy unleashed an explosive Steelpush downward, against the nails and iron rods in the rooftop.

Wax and the Coinshot were flung upward in a roar of wind and a sudden burst of g-forces. Wax managed to hang on to the Coinshot for the first part of the ride. But before they reached the peak of their ascent, the man put his hand to Wax's face, and Wax felt a sudden coldness.

His metal reserve vanished.

The Coinshot had another power. He was a Leecher, with the ability to drain other people's Allomancy. He smiled, meeting Wax's eyes—and Wax scrambled to grab a vial from the pouch on his metals belt. The Coinshot then grabbed Wax's metals belt in one hand and *kicked* the two of them apart. The belt, made to break away if someone Pushed on the metals inside, ripped free, and since Wax had his hand in it, the open latch meant the vials were flung out into the air.

But Wax had managed to grab one vial. His steel gone, a hundred feet in the air, he raised the vial to his lips—but only got the briefest taste of the liquid inside before the vial exploded. A shot from the enemy toward Wax's face barely missed—but hit the vial, shattering it.

Wax immediately increased his weight, and the strange way that affected his momentum meant his upward speed slowed to a crawl. The next shot passed through the air right over his head. A second after he crested his rise and started falling, he switched to filling his metalmind to instantly boost his downward speed—but made sure not to get so light that wind resistance would counteract that. More shots passed over his head as the Coinshot had trouble predicting his motion. Wax fell in a tumble, and despite the mayhem—despite the way his guts were in a knot and his mind dizzy from the sudden ejection—he realized one thing.

Without metals, he was dead. If he couldn't change his trajectory, the next bullets would strike him as the Coinshot adjusted his aim. Falling slowly wasn't enough. He reached for metals inside of him, and managed to find the faintest bit of steel from the sip. He used it to shove himself in the air, Pushing on the spire of a building, dodging the next shots from above.

Then it was gone. Nothing but rushing wind. Then he looked up and saw one of his vials tumbling downward, and he momentarily increased his weight once again to slow his fall and draw even with the vial. He stretched out his arm, reaching for it, but it was inches away, just beyond his fingertips …

Snap. The vial fell into his palm. Wax spun in the air, downing half the vial. Like a burst of light, his steelsight returned. He passed between buildings as he fell and Pushed himself, haphazardly, to the side. Bullets from above ripped through the air around him a moment later—the ground approaching at a frightening pace. At the last moment Wax threw the half-full vial beneath him and *Pushed.*

The vial hit the ground and exploded, but the metal inside was enough of an anchor. He slowed and hit the ground in a skid, mistcoat tassels flying around him. His heart thundering, he ripped his gun from its holster and pointed upward.

But the sky was empty. The man had decided to cut his losses and flee.

Wax had landed in a city square with decorative paving stones and a few impressive statues—designed in a strange chunky and blockish art style. His drop had drawn … well, more than a little attention. It seemed he had interrupted a dedication ceremony for a new building, for a journalist was there with an evanotype stand for taking pictures.

One flash of light later, and Wax had the sinking realization that he would be top-of-the-fold news in the afternoon broadsheets. Delightful. He stood up, calming himself, and took cover beneath an awning just in case. Then, as he was considering what to do next, a sleek black car rolled up and Hoid the coachman, of all people, popped out—wearing a chauffeur's cap and white gloves. What was *he* doing here?

"Your carriage, sir," Hoid said, gesturing.

"How on Scadrial did you find me?" Wax asked.

Hoid cocked an eyebrow at the gathering crowd. "Pardon, Lord Ladrian, but you *do* create quite a spectacle. It's not terribly difficult to track you."

Well, that was fair. As the crowd started chattering, Wax could see the appeal of slipping into the car and driving off. But the others were still fighting for their lives.

"Thanks, Hoid," he said. "But Wayne and Marasi need me." He launched into the air, drawing even more attention—and a second flash of light from the evanotype machine.

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Marasi reluctantly agreed to let the local constables handle cleaning up the site—though she'd managed to retrieve two of her Allomantic grenades—and imprisoning the Set members they'd managed to capture. She disliked the idea, as it would possibly mean the captives ended up in the Set's hands. But there wasn't much she could do about that at the moment. Her wounded officers were a more pressing concern.

Beyond that … well, the moment Blantach and her people had arrived, the entire mission had become a huge mess. Which was how—three hours after rolling into Bilming—she found herself with Wayne, VenDell, and Wax in a room of the Bilming Constabulary headquarters. She'd seen to her people in the hospital, and was sitting with the casualty report.

Two dead constables. Rusts, it hurt to read their names. This was a disaster.

For now though, she tried to keep her mind on their predicament. "So you're saying," she said, "that Harmony is *blind*?"

Wax nodded, his eyes distant as he stood nearby, staring at the wall. "He said he'd send us what help he could. But he was frightened, Marasi. Legitimately frightened. And given what Steris and I uncovered … I worry our enemies are close to a weapon. Dangerously close."

He glanced at her, then fell silent. They didn't want to say too much, in case they were being observed. No one was at the door, but they could listen in on this little room in other ways. Wan yellow walls and a free-hanging light bulb gave the place an intentionally bleak air. She bet they used it for interrogations.

The Bilming officers hadn't locked the door—they wouldn't dare—but Wax and the others had been forced to surrender their weapons. And when they'd been dropped off in here, the implication had been clear: *Don't try anything.*

Though they had been given four chairs, only Marasi sat—at the back of the room. Wax paced in front of the door. VenDell sat on the floor by the wall, looking exhausted. He'd stitched up his bones, holding them in place with sinew, making the features lumpy and unnatural. Like a ceramic sculpture that had been dropped, then glued back together with the pieces misaligned.

Wayne was, of course, napping.

On the floor, hat over his eyes, rolled-up jacket under his head as a pillow. Rusting man. She wished it were so easy for her. With two dead, she felt her confidence crumbling. Cali Hatthew had been a constable for only two years—and had begged to come on this mission. That blood was on Marasi's hands. She thought she'd planned well, but …

Wax walked over and squatted down. "Hey," he said, "you all right?"

She shook her head, tapping the casualty report. "The two people who knew anything useful escaped, and I lost two good constables. At least a dozen others have serious wounds, *and* I caused a potential intercity incident. Oh, and the Set will have all their people released, just for an *extra* kick to the shins."

He winced. "Marasi, we're fighting some of the craftiest and most powerful people in the world. We *are* going to be outmaneuvered now and then. You did well, keeping everyone as safe as possible."

"We'd be dead if you hadn't arrived."

"But I did. You're not a killer, Marasi. Not by trade. Your job is to investigate, plan, and enforce the law."

"And your job?" she asked.

He stood up. "I'm Harmony's sword, Marasi. Recently taken off the weapon rack, the dust blown free. Regardless of what happened today, we need to keep working. Because something big *is* happening in this city.

Something extremely dangerous. You lost two good people today—but they died trying to prevent the deaths of *millions*.”

She nodded, rubbing her temples to try to banish her headache. If he and Steris were right … if the enemy was trying to sneak a bomb into Elendel …

“All right,” she said, trying to focus. “We need leads. What do we do now that the Sequence escaped? Where do we look?”

“Working on that,” he said. “The man I fought was spiked. So was the Cycle you killed, as was the woman Wayne fought. Each of those spikes requires the death of a Metalborn.”

“The kidnappings?” Marasi asked, her stomach turning.

Over the last ten years, the Set’s primary activity—the one that had first drawn Wax and Marasi’s attention—had been a series of kidnappings of women with strong Allomantic genetic lines. Research over the last few years had proven they weren’t alone. Others, both men and women, had been vanishing—mostly from the Roughs, where such disappearances weren’t reported. Always Metalborn, or with Metalborn in their family lines.

Wax and Marasi’s worries about why had been disturbing. Now, to find members of the Set with access to so many powers …

“We tried following the kidnappings, Wax,” she said. “Dead ends, every one. Are we *sure* that Harmony didn’t see anything about this? Maybe before he was blinded?”

“He can be cryptic, even to us,” VenDell said softly from where he sat by the wall. He glanced up at them, his broken face moving strangely. “But I don’t think he knows where those people went. When we were hunting for them, we wondered why Harmony didn’t feed us more information. Why he didn’t look into the secret parts of the world and tell us. I think he’s been unable to see details for some time. But he’s been … concealing his disability from us.”

The kandra sighed, suddenly looking tired—his skin going transparent and faintly green. “And … there’s more, Waxillium. He tries to hide it, but I think … something is wrong with Harmony. I see a dark shadow behind him.”

“What good is it having God on your side,” Marasi said, folding her arms, “if he doesn’t do anything to help?”

“He *did* do something to help,” Wax replied. “He sent us. A lesson he keeps trying to teach me.”

“I will contact him,” VenDell said, “and request further aid. But Waxillium is right … Constable Colms, we *are* his attempt to do something.”

Wax turned to the side, his expression again distant. He hadn’t told her everything that had happened to him years ago. She thought maybe Wax had *died* for a moment. Before she’d found him broken in that cold, forgotten shrine. He’d met with Harmony.

Now Wax talked like *this* sometimes. With an authority regarding religious matters that she hadn’t heard from priests.

The door opened, and Captain Blantach walked in. She’d changed to a clean uniform, and had obviously run a comb through her short blonde hair, but she still appeared frazzled. Perhaps because of the man who walked in behind her.

Oh hell, Marasi thought. *She brought the mayor.*

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Wax sighed. This had just become a political matter rather than a jurisdictional one. Granted, the entire day had been heading that direction like a galloping stagecoach with no driver. He glanced at Marasi, who nodded. He should take the lead here.

He stepped forward to meet the lord mayor of Bilming, Lord Gave Entrone. A man that Wax had encountered on several occasions now—each more repulsive than the last. And that was saying something, since at their first interaction Entrone had insulted Steris to her face.

Gave had come up in the world, outgrowing his hometown of New Seran. Two years ago he'd landed in Bilming—at the very center of Outer Cities politics—and had somehow proven himself to be the exact sort of person they wanted "standing up" to tyrannical Elendel.

Today he was dressed in formal wear, and even checked his cufflinks as they entered—no doubt to show off the sparkling diamonds set into the wood. Slicked-back black hair, a chin you could use to cut the tops off tin cans. And, of course, his characteristic smug smile.

Lord mayor of Bilming was an important position—probably the most important one outside of Elendel. Which meant Wax had to be careful not to insult him. This would be a delicate conversation.

"Oi!" Wayne said, sitting up. "Hey, Wax! Somebody done sewn a sack of dicks together and made a person! It's even walking!"

The room fell silent. Then VenDell snickered.

"Are you going to apologize for that, Ladrian?" Gave asked.

“Oh!” Wayne said, heaving himself to his feet. “It’s Gave Entrone. Sorry, Lord Mayor! I mistook you for something else. Though the resemblance, it’s downright uncanny, it is.”

“Wayne?” Wax said.

“Yeah, boss?”

“Please stop helping.”

“Got it.”

Wax’s and Entrone’s eyes locked. Wax was certain the man had ties to the Set. A partial explanation for his exceptional rise through Outer Cities politics.

“So, here we are,” Gave said, rubbing his hands together. “Waxillium Ladrian. The great lawman of the Roughs. Involved in an *illegal* operation in my city!”

“We have jurisdiction here!” Marasi said. “By the code—”

“Code seventeen of the United Justice Act?” Gave said. “We repealed that, you recall? Three months ago.”

“You can’t repeal it,” Wax said. “You don’t have the authority.”

“We don’t have authority?” Entrone said. “To have a say in the policing of our *own city*? Why, that *is* an arrogant thing to assert, wouldn’t you say, Captain Blantach?”

“It’s technically true, Lord Mayor,” she replied.

“Technically,” he said, “one of those dirty maskers from the South could pass a law saying they have ‘jurisdiction’ here. But what right would they have?” He had walked a circuit of the room and halted in front of Wax. “They aren’t one of *our* kind.”

“I see what you’re doing, Entrone,” Wax said softly.

“Do you?” he whispered, getting close enough that Wax could smell the mint on his breath. “Do you *truly* appreciate how *delicious* this is? You worked so hard to prevent that stupid bill from passing—and yet here you are, in my hands. By *our* laws you’re a criminal, in violation of a *dozen* different codes. Your only fallback is to ignore our authority—the very thing you have spent *months* arguing that we deserve. I have you, Ladrian. You’re mine.”

“The governor will never stand for this,” Marasi said.

Obviously, that was what Entrone wanted. He *wanted* Wax to go crawling back to Elendel for a pardon. And the Supremacy Bill? Well, by insisting Elendel had authority to override local authority, Wax would prove himself a hypocrite. That would give more fuel to the war between Elendel and the Outer Cities. Exactly what this man wanted.

Entrone smiled. Showing no teeth. Just two smug lips that would look *so* much better split and bloodied. Wax restrained himself with effort.

Ruin, I hate this man, he thought.

“Perhaps,” VenDell said, standing up, “you might be willing to listen to a … higher authority, Lord Mayor.” The kandra made his skin turn fully transparent, showing the bones underneath—the skull behind his face, cracked and stuck together with sinew. It was an eerie sight, particularly since VenDell chose to leave the eyeballs normal—and they seemed to float in the jelly that his face had become.

“Ah!” Entrone said. “One of the puppets! Look how it tries to frighten us, Captain Blantach!”

“Er, yes,” VenDell said. “I’m an emissary and representative of Harmony.”

“I’m not Pathian,” Gave said, with a wave of his hand. “Why should I care?”

“About God?” VenDell asked.

“Not my god,” Gave replied. “My god is industry, progress, and the indomitability of the human soul. Not some priest who managed to slurp up some juice left by a long-dead entity. Oh! Look, Captain Blantach! It pretends to be shocked by my words!”

“He doesn’t pretend,” Wax said. “VenDell is a person like any of us. Merely a little more … malleable.”

“Oh, Ladrian,” Entrone said, then had the audacity to pat Wax on the arm. “So easily fooled. Kandra are animals. Puppets. Why, they aren’t even really alive. They’re mistwraiths *pretending* to be people, and I fail to see how I’m to be *intimidated* by a talking piece of slime that…”

He trailed off as he noticed that Wayne, subtly, had edged up close to him.

“… a piece of slime,” Gave continued, “that … er…”

“Keep goin’,” Wayne said, his eyes alarmingly wide. “Keep insultin’ my friends. *Do it.*”

Entrone backed away, looking thoroughly unnerved. “You have one hour,” he said to Wax, “until I formally announce we’re pressing charges. Either break out of here—and perhaps shoot some officers of the law—or call your governor and beg for his help. I’m having a radio box delivered to you.”

He retreated in a rush, trying to watch Wayne at the same time. He ended up leaving Blantach behind.

“What a knob,” Wayne said, dropping the creepy wide-eyed act.

“I … apologize,” Blantach said. “I’m afraid I had no choice but to call him.”

“It’s fine, Blantach,” Marasi said. “But you *must* understand. You can’t throw us in prison—not without risking the fate of the entire Basin. Please listen.”

“I’ll see if I can … work something out.” Blantach glanced over her shoulder and into the constabulary office. “But this is out of my hands now, Colms. Next time, *contact* us before you run an operation in our city.”

She withdrew, shutting the door—which had a small viewing window at the top. A moment later a guard delivered a radio box, then lingered outside to keep an eye on them.

Wax sighed, turning to the others. He wasn’t about to trust a radio delivered into his hands by an enemy.

VenDell’s skin had returned to normal shades. The kandra hesitated, then glanced at Wayne. “Did you mean what you said? Am I actually … your friend?”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “I mean, you’re the stuck-up one that we make fun of, but every crew needs one of those.” He pointed at Wax, then Marasi, then VenDell. “Mine has three. Five if you include Steris, since she counts fer two. But you can never have too many.”

“I … see,” VenDell said, scratching the side of his head.

“Point is,” Wayne continued, “*we* can make fun of you because we like you. That’s how it works. Anybody else does it, and we ram a dueling cane up a part of them that I can’t mention, ’cuz I’m working on my language.”

“You are?” Marasi said.

“Yup. Ranette keeps sayin’ I need to watch what I say, ’cuz there might be children around. Which is real strange, don’t you think? Children are the ones who won’t understand what I’m sayin’ anyway. So why care if *they* hear?”

Wax turned to the door, his mind racing, trying to think of a way out of the current situation—but a part of him realized it was no use. He could walk out of here and ignore Entrone. But that would add another piece of wood to the fire—stoking civil war. Beyond that, could he continue to investigate in the city without being hounded by constables at every step?

How does the bomb factor into this? Wax thought. *The talk of ashfalls. My sister. What is really going on?*

He might have a way to find answers. He felt inside his belt, which he’d recovered and refilled from his ammo stash—the large duffel he’d brought and hidden on top of a building. In his belt pouch, alongside the metal vials, he felt the earring Harmony had given him.

And the other one. Made of trellium.

Damn it. He was going to have to at least try. He pulled the trellium earring out and slipped it into his ear.

He felt a jolt and a disconnect, like the coach he was riding in had hit a bump. Different from when he talked to Harmony. Then he felt *drawn* toward something powerful. A vibration ran through him, forceful, violent. He gasped, the room fuzzing around him.

Immediately, a familiar voice pierced his mind like a spike to the brain.

Faster. I need this to work.

Telsin. He was hearing his sister speak. He thought he could sense some of her surroundings. She was outside … no echo of a room.

Our time runs thin, she continued. *The backup delivery device is too obvious. Too easy to stop. I* need *the primary working. I need*— The voice hesitated. *I sense something,* she said, then stepped to the side.

Her voice grew louder, focused on him. *Out with it. You fought my brother. I know that part already. It … Wait.*

Waxillium? Is that you? Ah … It is. *I can sense you. Found yourself a trellium earring, did you? Clever. Your idea, or was it that god of yours?*

“Hello, Telsin,” he whispered. No use trying to lie. She could feel him, as clearly as he felt her. He tried to summon some familial emotion. But right now, he felt only haunted by that voice. It was an echo from a long-lost time. A time he’d left behind, but which wouldn’t leave him.

So, you’re in Bilming. She sounded amused. *Your arrival made a characteristic amount of noise. Good to see that nothing changes. You never could make anything useful of yourself unless you also made a huge mess for me.*

“Telsin,” he said softly, “what are you doing?”

What needs to be done, Brother. As always.

“I…”

What could he say? All of his objections felt hollow. “You’ll get millions killed”? Six years ago, she’d been willing to let her own people die to achieve her goals. She wouldn’t care about the people of Elendel. “You’ll betray our people”? She’d been willing to betray *him.* “You’re playing with forces beyond your control.” That was the sort of thing she liked, always dancing closer to the flame.

What did he hope to accomplish? He should have thought this through. He knew better than to walk into the enemy’s den without a plan.

Ah, Wax, Telsin said in his mind. *Still pretending, aren’t you? Telling yourself that you’re the hero? Where was that hero when our family needed him? Off playing in the Roughs. Running from real responsibility.*

I’ll tell you what I’m doing. What needs to be done. *This world, and everyone on it, is doomed. Unless I intervene. The same way I had to step up and lead after you ran off. You aren’t the hero, Waxillium. You never were. You ran away, like a child who can’t stand the rules of the—*

He pulled the earring out, breathing heavily.

Rusts. All these years later, and she could still get to him. That had been a terrible idea.

At least, he thought, *I know she’s actually what Harmony said. Some kind of avatar for the enemy. And she’s tense, urgent. She’s on a deadline. She’s worried. Because I’m here in the city.*

He considered what she’d been saying, about a “primary delivery device” and a “backup.”

He looked around the room, but the others didn’t seem to have noticed what he’d done. They were lost in their own thoughts or problems. All but VenDell, who watched him keenly.

Wax wiped his brow with his hand. “You … mentioned help, from Harmony?” he asked, his voice hoarse.

“It’s close.” VenDell turned, glancing at the door. “Oh. Rather, I should say it’s here. See for yourself.”

Frowning, Wax stepped up to the door and peered through the observation window. The guard was staring toward the front doors of the building.

Where Death had arrived.

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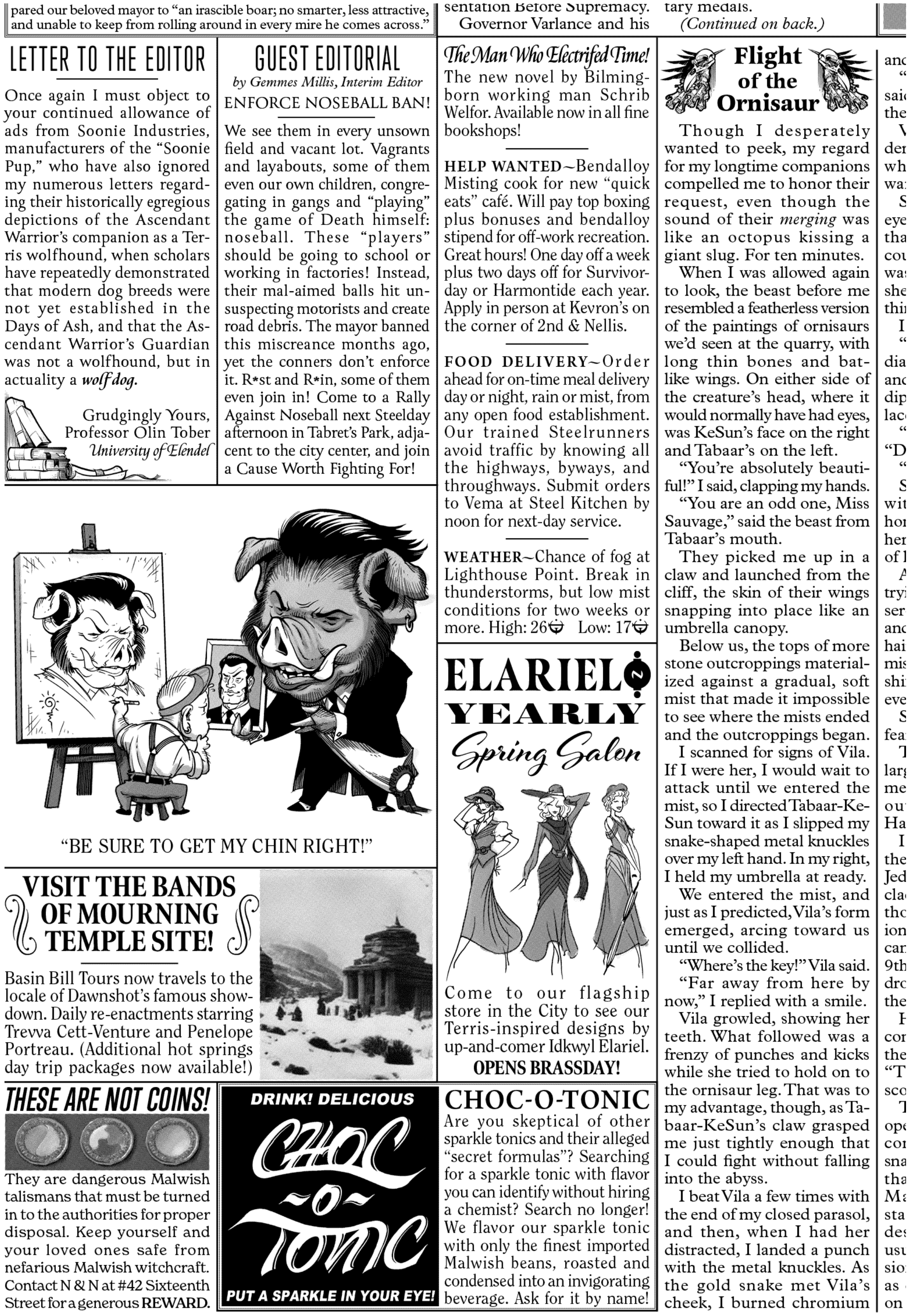

pared our beloved mayor to "an irascible boar; no smarter, less attractive, and unable to keep from rolling around in every mire he comes across."

sentation Before Supremacy.
Governor Varlance and his

tary medals.
(Continued on back.)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Once again I must object to your continued allowance of ads from Soonie Industries, manufacturers of the "Soonie Pup," who have also ignored my numerous letters regarding their historically egregious depictions of the Ascendant Warrior's companion as a Terris wolfhound, when scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that modern dog breeds were not yet established in the Days of Ash, and that the Ascendant Warrior's Guardian was not a wolfhound, but in actuality a ***wolfdog.***

Grudgingly Yours,
Professor Olin Tober
University of Elendel

GUEST EDITORIAL

by Gemmes Millis, Interim Editor

ENFORCE NOSEBALL BAN!

We see them in every unsown field and vacant lot. Vagrants and layabouts, some of them even our own children, congregating in gangs and "playing" the game of Death himself: noseball. These "players" should be going to school or working in factories! Instead, their mal-aimed balls hit unsuspecting motorists and create road debris. The mayor banned this miscreance months ago, yet the conners don't enforce it. R*st and R*in, some of them even join in! Come to a Rally Against Noseball next Steelday afternoon in Tabret's Park, adjacent to the city center, and join a Cause Worth Fighting For!

"BE SURE TO GET MY CHIN RIGHT!"

VISIT THE BANDS OF MOURNING TEMPLE SITE!

Basin Bill Tours now travels to the locale of Dawnshot's famous showdown. Daily re-enactments starring Trevva Cett-Venture and Penelope Portreau. (Additional hot springs day trip packages now available!)

THESE ARE NOT COINS!

They are dangerous Malwish talismans that must be turned in to the authorities for proper disposal. Keep yourself and your loved ones safe from nefarious Malwish witchcraft. Contact N & N at #42 Sixteenth Street for a generous REWARD.

DRINK! DELICIOUS

CHOC -O- TONIC

PUT A SPARKLE IN YOUR EYE!

The Man Who Electrifed Time!

The new novel by Bilmingborn working man Schrib Welfor. Available now in all fine bookshops!

HELP WANTED~Bendalloy Misting cook for new "quick eats" café. Will pay top boxing plus bonuses and bendalloy stipend for off-work recreation. Great hours! One day off a week plus two days off for Survivorday or Harmontide each year. Apply in person at Kevron's on the corner of 2nd & Nellis.

FOOD DELIVERY~Order ahead for on-time meal delivery day or night, rain or mist, from any open food establishment. Our trained Steelrunners avoid traffic by knowing all the highways, byways, and throughways. Submit orders to Vema at Steel Kitchen by noon for next-day service.

WEATHER~Chance of fog at Lighthouse Point. Break in thunderstorms, but low mist conditions for two weeks or more. High: 26⊖ Low: 17⊖

ELARIEL YEARLY Spring Salon

Come to our flagship store in the City to see our Terris-inspired designs by up-and-comer Idkwyl Elariel.

OPENS BRASSDAY!

CHOC-O-TONIC

Are you skeptical of other sparkle tonics and their alleged "secret formulas"? Searching for a sparkle tonic with flavor you can identify without hiring a chemist? Search no longer! We flavor our sparkle tonic with only the finest imported Malwish beans, roasted and condensed into an invigorating beverage. Ask for it by name!

Flight of the Ornisaur

Though I desperately wanted to peek, my regard for my longtime companions compelled me to honor their request, even though the sound of their *merging* was like an octopus kissing a giant slug. For ten minutes.

When I was allowed again to look, the beast before me resembled a featherless version of the paintings of ornisaurs we'd seen at the quarry, with long thin bones and bat-like wings. On either side of the creature's head, where it would normally have had eyes, was KeSun's face on the right and Tabaar's on the left.

"You're absolutely beautiful!" I said, clapping my hands.

"You are an odd one, Miss Sauvage," said the beast from Tabaar's mouth.

They picked me up in a claw and launched from the cliff, the skin of their wings snapping into place like an umbrella canopy.

Below us, the tops of more stone outcroppings materialized against a gradual, soft mist that made it impossible to see where the mists ended and the outcroppings began.

I scanned for signs of Vila. If I were her, I would wait to attack until we entered the mist, so I directed Tabaar-KeSun toward it as I slipped my snake-shaped metal knuckles over my left hand. In my right, I held my umbrella at ready.

We entered the mist, and just as I predicted, Vila's form emerged, arcing toward us until we collided.

"Where's the key!" Vila said.

"Far away from here by now," I replied with a smile.

Vila growled, showing her teeth. What followed was a frenzy of punches and kicks while she tried to hold on to the ornisaur leg. That was to my advantage, though, as Tabaar-KeSun's claw grasped me just tightly enough that I could fight without falling into the abyss.

I beat Vila a few times with the end of my closed parasol, and then, when I had her distracted, I landed a punch with the metal knuckles. As the gold snake met Vila's cheek, I burned chromium

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Wax had never seen Death himself, though Marasi had met the creature once. Known as Ironeyes, the ancient Inquisitor had weighty spikes through his eyes, the points jutting out the back of his skull. One of his eye sockets had been crushed during a fight, as recorded in the Words of Founding that Harmony—Sazed—had left. Wax could make out the scars, intermingled with faded tattoos, outlining the eye sockets.

Death wore voluminous black robes and had ghostly skin—looking ill. The hands jutting from his sleeves were so lean they appeared skeletal. Wax had grown accustomed to speaking with beings out of myth; the kandra, even TenSoon, were practically mundane to him these days. But he still felt an unsettling disquiet at seeing Ironeyes. This being was said to escort the souls of the dead to the Beyond.

The entire room outside—filled with desks, constables, and underlings—had grown silent. No one dared turn a page of paperwork; they all stared at that figure silhouetted against the brazen sunlight behind. Something emanated from him. A dread that crushed the soul like a hand around yesterday’s broadsheet. A …

No, Wax thought. *I do not fear this. I’ve stared down death already.*

Strangely, the sensation of dread evaporated from him. Had that been … emotional Allomancy? It was difficult to recognize in the throes of it, but it appeared obvious in hindsight. Yet this time it didn’t affect Wax as it did everyone else, including Marasi, judging by how pale her face had gone.

Wax took a deep breath, pushed open the door, and strode out past the guard. Wax walked through the center of the room and met up with Ironeyes, who was uncommonly tall. As Wax had always imagined, actually.

“Sword,” Death said, focusing spikes upon him. “We need to speak.”

Wax gestured into the room with the others, and Death walked past the stunned constables, though one—bearing the shoulder patch of a Seeker—managed to pull out a gun. Not a move Wax would have advised. All Death did was wave absently and Pull the gun across the room to catch it. Then, making it hover between his hands—an incredible feat, the difficulty of which few non-Allomancers would grasp—he flexed. And the gun’s barrel *crunched.*

Wax froze. Hell. He’d *never* seen someone do *that* with their powers before. How would you even accomplish it?

Push on the near end, Pull on the far end, he thought. *But damn, the power involved …*

The gun dropped to the floor, and as Wax and Death reached the door, they saw that Entrone and Blantach had stepped out of an office, their eyes wide.

“Ah,” Ironeyes said, focusing on the lord mayor. “Gave. I never cared much for the members of House Entrone I knew during my mortality.”

“I…” Entrone said. “This is my prisoner. Who…”

“I require privacy,” Ironeyes said. “You will return to these mortals their weapons. Once our conference is finished, you will impede their investigation in this city no further.”

“I’m not of your religion…”

“Death is not a religion,” Ironeyes said. “It is a fact.”

“But—”

“How would you like to die, mortal?” Ironeyes asked, stepping closer, robes billowing around him. “And when? Quietly? In the night, of a failing heart? Drowning, on one of your new ships as it sinks? Here? Right now? Crushed by the weight of your own stupidity?”

Entrone licked his lips, then whispered, “As you demand, Ironeyes, it shall be done.” It appeared that he could indeed be superstitious without being religious.

Wax walked into the room, and Ironeyes swept in after. “Wayne,” Death said softly, closing the door, “kindly watch the door to make certain we are not observed or listened to.”

“Uh, sure,” Wayne said, scrambling over to the door and its window. “They’re all just standin’ out there. ’Cept the few that have fainted. Neat.” He glanced at Ironeyes. “That accent of yours … real old, *real* interesting … I actually kinda got it right.”

Death sank down into a chair and seemed to *age* suddenly. Wrinkles sank from the corners of his eyes, crossing his face, and his jowls sagged. He sighed loudly, tipping his metal eyes toward the ceiling. “Lord Ruler,” he muttered. “That was a performance, wasn’t it? And to think that I was the *reasonable* one in the crew.”

Marasi and Wax shared a glance.

“Ironeyes?” Marasi asked. “Are you … well?”

“No,” he said. “I run low on atium, and so age finally emerges from the shadows. It has always stalked me. Now it senses the kill. I was here in Bilming, seeking answers. They try to re-create the metal, and I thought maybe…”

“If you run out…” Marasi said, “… you die?”

He nodded. “I was going to let it happen. I have lived so much, far longer than my due. But I helped destroy this world—unwillingly, yes, but my weakness led to much sorrow. I swore I would help. And so, I struggle yet to live…”

Rusts. Death took a deep breath, and the lines on his face retreated—then regrew when he exhaled. It looked like he was vacillating between decades of age with each breath.

“Trell wants to own this planet,” Death whispered. “So your time dwindles, as does mine.” He studied Wax with those inscrutable not-eyes. “I’ve grown too weak to continue hunting those who would destroy this land. My display earlier will get you out of this room, perhaps convince the local constables to leave you alone, but that … might be all I can offer.”

Wax knelt beside the aging demigod, a thought striking him. “You were in the city, hunting for atium. Why?”

“Because someone here is trying to split harmonium,” he explained. “And create the metal again. Though making lerasium would be far more dangerous…”

“Do you know what happens?” Marasi asked. “When someone tries to split harmonium?”

Death shook his head.

“An explosion,” Wax said. “A *big* explosion. It’s what we’re trying to stop. Do you have any leads?”

“One, perhaps,” Death said, thoughtful. “A man vanished two weeks ago. I only just ran across his name: Tobal Copper. He made some kind of legal disturbance that mentioned splitting harmonium in the months before he disappeared. Finding out what happened to him would have been my next step.”

Wax nodded. A lead—a slim one, but still somewhere to start. The way his sister talked … it made him feel an increasing urgency.

“Ironeyes?” Marasi asked, stepping over.

“You may call me Marsh,” he said softly. “It … feels good to hear that name. To remember what I used to be.”

“Marsh,” she said. “How did you crush that gun?”

“Duralumin,” he said absently, “and a lot of practice. Listen, child. Harmony is growing increasingly indecisive. He denies it, but I *see* it. That gives Autonomy—Trell, the god of the outworlders—a chance to move in. She seeks to eliminate us from the stage of galactic politics before we even step onto it, and her followers are already armed with Hemalurgy. You studied the book I gave you?”

“Yes,” she said. “And Waxillium practically memorized it.” Wax nodded in agreement.

“Your enemy,” Death said softly, “has learned how to circumvent one of the most important limitations to Hemalurgy: her agents bear too many spikes. That should open them to Harmony’s influence, but it doesn’t. Either Harmony is too weak to exploit what they’ve done, or they’ve found a way to use Trell’s own metal to offset the weakness.

“This is extremely dangerous. So far, I do not believe they’ve learned the secret to Compounding via Hemalurgy. Identity contamination prevents it; that is our only saving grace. If they could do that … or, Lord Ruler … if they get atium, or lerasium…"

"So … what do we do?" Wayne asked from the door.

"What we've always done," Marsh said. "Survive." He looked to Wax again. "The people of Bilming think they are accomplishing so much, building this navy of theirs to threaten Elendel. It is all part of Trell's plan somehow. Be warned. Be careful. She steers them. I've been … dull of mind lately, as I try to fight off what is happening to me."

"We'll stop them," Marasi said. "I promise it, Marsh."

Wayne waved to them. A moment later, an attendant arrived with their weapons and equipment. She then withdrew to let them rearm.

"Marsh," Marasi said, slipping a small handgun into her shoulder bag, "have you ever seen a symbol like this?" She quickly sketched three interlocking diamonds in her notepad. They reminded Wax of something. Some architectural designs from around Elendel?

Yes, he thought. *Near the Field of Rebirth.* Actually, it resembled the three-petal shape of a Marewill flower.

"This is my brother's symbol," Marsh said. "He does what he thinks is best. As has always been the case with him. He … is not the best at self-reflection, but he *does* want to protect Scadrial. His agents will align with your interests."

"I think I saw through his eyes," Wax said. "Once, years ago. Is he still alive? The Survivor?"

"Alive?" Marsh asked. "It depends, I suppose, on your definition. He's close to alive. How is that?"

"You mean … he's a ghost?" Wayne asked.

"After a fashion," Marsh replied. "He's less alive than I am, but perhaps more than other ghosts? It's hard to say. Three of us remain from that original crew. After all this time. Only three. Legs to a tripod, balancing one another. And without one … I do not know what would happen."

Wax didn't know what to make of that. Still, it felt good to strap his guns back on, and they had a lead now. A name and, it appeared, permission to leave this office without being chased. He'd take it, even if Death himself was …

“I will stay here,” VenDell said as they gathered at the door. “I will ensure that Lord Ironeyes is cared for, and look after the constables in the hospital. I … do not think I will be of further value to your investigation.”

“As you wish,” Wax said.

“Just remember what you know, Lord Ladrian,” VenDell said. “What you said earlier. Harmony puts people where they need to be, but then they must act. It is his way.”

Wax nodded. “Wayne, Marasi—are you ready?”

“I am,” Marasi said, slinging her bag over her shoulder.

They looked to Wayne, who put his hands on his hips. “Did either of you know that ghosts was real?”

“Does it matter?” Marasi asked.

“Does it matter if *ghosts* are *real*?” Wayne said. “I think it matters, Marasi. I think it *rusting* does!”

“I’m told it is better to refer to them as Cognitive Shadows,” Marsh mumbled.

“Wayne,” Wax said, “can we please focus?”

“Fine, fine,” he said, sliding his dueling canes into their loops on his belt. “Seems unfair to grouse at a man for getting discombobulated by definitive proof of an afterlife. Dark gods. Death himself dyin’. Rusting ghosts. Guess we gotta keep goin’, but after this, I don’t wanna see anyone complainin’ when I’ve traded for someone’s favorite shoes or whatnot. Hear me?”

Together they marched out through the quiet constabulary office and into the sunlight.

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Right, Marasi thought, trying to pull her emotions together. *Conversation with Death. Just another* everyday *conversation with* Death *himself …*

She couldn’t blame Wayne for feeling out of sorts. But they had to stay focused. Unfortunately, she and the others hadn’t even reached the bottom of the constabulary office steps before someone came running down after them. Flushed from exertion—and perhaps stress—Blantach looked a great deal less sure of herself now than she had earlier.

Marasi stepped forward to meet Blantach. “Yes?”

“He’s going to send people after you,” she said. “As soon as he gets over the shock of what happened in there with … you-know-who. I know Lord Entrone. He takes a great deal of pride in how ‘modern’ and ‘forward thinking’ he is. He’ll decide you tricked him, and will send constables to arrest you.”

Wax groaned softly, stepping up behind them. “We don’t have time to dodge patrols.”

“Look,” Blantach said, “I … have *no idea* what’s going on in this city. I thought I did. Until…” She glanced at the office building and shivered. “I had my illusions shattered quite violently. Something dangerous is going on here.”

“More than dangerous, Blantach,” Marasi said. “Catastrophic.”

“Right. Right,” Blantach said. “Was that *really* … you know…?”

“Yes,” Marasi said. “I’ve met him before.”

“Rusts…” Blantach took a deep breath and turned to face them again. “I think I can keep Entrone off your back if you let me send an officer with you.”

“Out of the question,” Wax said.

Blantach stepped closer and met his eyes. “Listen. This is my city. I don’t know what—or who—you’re afraid of, but I’m not part of it. I want to help, and this is the only thing I can think of. If you have a Bilming officer with you, I can persuade Entrone I’ve got someone watching you.”

She turned, gesturing, and a figure came scrambling down the steps, nearly tripping at the end. The slender woman pushed her overly large spectacles up on her face, but that nearly made her drop the three ledgers she was trying to carry. Shoulder-length black hair fell around her face as she struggled to keep the ledgers in hand. She pushed it back and grinned sheepishly—through lips with bright red lipstick.

It was Moonlight.

“She says she knows you,” Blantach said, “and that you might be willing to trust her? Kim is one of our researchers—she’s not a field agent, but she knows her way around Bilming and can help you work in the city.”

Moonlight … “Kim” … thrust out her hand to shake—which almost caused her to drop her ledgers again. She scrambled to catch them.

“She looks fun,” Wayne said.

“You’re just imagining tying her shoelaces together,” Wax said, his arms folded. “Marasi, do you know this person?”

“I … do,” Marasi said.

“From where?” he asked.

Sharing the truth with Blantach didn’t seem like a good idea. “We worked on a project together a while ago—she came to Elendel to further some research she was doing.”

Wax narrowed his eyes, obviously trying to decide if that made Kim more or less suspicious. Marasi, though, felt maybe she could trust the woman. A little. After all, Marsh *had* said that people with the interlocking diamond tattoos would be on their side.

Moonlight saluted Wax. “I promise to be of use, sir, and not get in your way.” She grimaced. “Except maybe by accident.”

“I think we should bring her,” Marasi said.

Wax nodded. “You’re on the team then, Kim. Let’s see if you can be of use. A man named Tobal Copper vanished in this city recently. I want to track down where he lived and interrogate anyone who might have known him.”

“Oh!” Moonlight said. “I don’t have that kind of information *on* me, of course. I just carry around the city maps and details! But I can get you into the records office! We should be able to find answers there.”

“Which will let them know what we’re doing,” Wax said. “The Set is sure to have agents in such an important place.”

“I doubt there’s another way to get this information,” Marasi said. “We’ll just have to move quickly, to stay ahead of them.”

“Agreed,” Wax said after a moment’s thought. “Lead on, Kim. Captain Blantach, anything you could do to keep the lord mayor off our backs would be *most* appreciated.”

* * *

The Bilming City Records and Research Building was a *huge* improvement over the similar offices in Elendel. Marasi had been forced to spend many an hour in closets, searching through thick ledgers of names or broadsheet archives.

This building, however, was a sleek silvery structure, each side more window than wall. Blantach led them inside herself, and a flash of her constable’s credentials got them assigned a flock of junior researchers before she bade the group farewell.

In minutes, Marasi and the others were sitting in comfortable chairs in a glass-walled meeting room, sipping tea while waiting for the results. All but Wax, who paced like a caged animal.

Well, Marasi might have preferred some of Allik’s hot chocolate, but this *certainly* beat spending bleary-eyed hours sorting through old records on her own. The break gave her a moment to jot down a letter to Allik—saying not to worry if he heard of casualties via the broadsheets.

She paused. Then she added that he should take a short trip to the countryside to visit her father, and stay out of Elendel for the day. Just in case.

She stepped out to send the message—she'd seen a radio station on the way to the archive. As she walked down the too-white hallway, Moonlight emerged from a side passage. Hadn't she gone to the restroom? Marasi glanced over her shoulder and saw that the meeting room where she'd left Wax and Wayne was out of sight.

"Good," Moonlight said softly. "I was hoping you'd take the cue and slip out to meet me."

"I didn't, actually," Marasi said. "We should go explain who you are to the others—there's no reason to keep it a secret."

"I'd prefer not to," Moonlight said lightly. "I'm not here for them. I'm here for you."

"I thought you couldn't interfere?"

"Not without orders," Moonlight said. "I've received some: I can help, but I'm not to reveal myself to the other two. My mentor is worried about their connections to Harmony."

Marasi stopped in the hallway, which was empty save for them. "I'm not going to lie to my companions, Moonlight."

"You already have."

"Only to avoid revealing you to Blantach," Marasi said.

"And do you assume those two tell you everything about their lives?" Moonlight said. "Every little detail?"

"The important ones."

"What did Waxillium and Harmony discuss when he died?"

"That's … not important."

"Seems to me that it is." Moonlight stepped around Marasi to stand right in front of her. Not really blocking her way, but making certain Marasi met her eyes. "Do you want answers? We have those. Do you want to protect Scadrial? That's our main purpose. But we *can't* move in the open. That invites our enemies to strike—beings like Trell are too powerful and Harmony is too indecisive. What's he doing to help?"

"He sent us," Marasi said.

"He tossed you into the line of fire and said, 'Good luck!' It's not his fault—my mentor speaks of him quite fondly. But the reality of your planet’s situation is dire, and so we *must* move in the shadows. And our secrets *must* be maintained—known only by those who have proven themselves.”

“Wax is the single most ‘proven’ man alive.”

“We’re not interested in him,” Moonlight said. “We’re interested in *you.* Doesn’t it excite you, to know things that he doesn’t—things almost no one else does? The secrets of the cosmere itself?”

“I don’t need to keep secrets from others to feel special.”

Moonlight smiled. “I believe you. How interesting. Well, for now I’m demanding you keep *my* secret. That’s the cost of my aid. I have *met* Autonomy; I know how she operates. You need me. But if you tell anyone about me, I’ll leave.”

“That’s your play? Extortion?”

“Extortion?” Moonlight said. “It’s just a deal. I have agency, Marasi. I don’t *have* to help you. I have a lead now—I can probably find my way to this Tobal Copper’s place on my own long before you.” She shrugged. “Waxillium trusts you. He’ll understand when you explain why you couldn’t tell him.”

She stepped aside and continued down the hallway, her mannerisms changing as she reached the meeting room door. She became jumpy and excited, and—after first pushing on it and blushing when it didn’t budge—pulled it open.

Marasi continued on her way, uncertain. There *was* something about how Moonlight talked … Chasing petty thugs, or even mobsters with dangerous intentions, had once thrilled Marasi. But the more she learned of the world and the forces moving in it, the less satisfied she was.

Long ago, she’d explained to Wax her philosophy on becoming a constable. She’d envisioned making the entire city safer—not by chasing criminals, but by changing the way people and neighborhoods saw themselves. Lock a man in prison, and you might stop him from committing crimes. Teach a man to respect himself and his community, and you stopped everyone he might have taught, recruited, or bullied.

She didn’t want to focus on individuals. She wanted to change the world. At least, that was how she’d thought when she’d first dreamed of becoming a constable. Had she let the day-to-day grind of the job turn her into something else?

By the time she returned from sending Allik the message, the research team had already arrived with answers—and was spreading out relevant broadsheets and city records for Wax. Marasi stepped up beside him—Moonlight sat primly in the corner with a disarming grin on her face. Wayne was pretending to nap, but he had one eye cracked, watching Moonlight.

Don't overdo the act, Moonlight, Marasi thought with satisfaction. *He'll catch you.*

"Tobal Copper," one of the researchers was saying, pointing at a listing. "Age fifty-three. A chemist, specializing in rubber and manufacturing. Worked for Basin Tires, making … well, tires."

"He lost his job," another explained, "about five years ago for … erratic behavior."

"Which means what, exactly?" Marasi said, surveying the papers set out on the long table.

"Well," the lead researcher said—a Terriswoman with curly hair and a V pattern on her shirt. "We pulled most of this information from a lawsuit he filed against his former employer. Seems that they … um … 'refused to listen to his vital discoveries about the impending end of the world.'"

Wax and Marasi shared a look.

"Go on," Wax said.

"There's not a lot to tell, unfortunately," the researcher said. "The lawsuit was dismissed before reaching even the first stage of trial. In this, he mentions pamphlets he'd created, but that's not the sort of record we archive. Instead we have his legal case, his apartment lease, and one police blotter record of an arrest."

"For disturbing the peace," the junior researcher said. "He was banging on the doors in his apartment complex, yelling that 'They've almost split harmonium, and when they do, it's going to destroy us all.'"

"We'll leave you with the information," the lead researcher said, patting the papers on the desk. "And we'll keep searching—but I doubt we'll turn up anything else. We keep careful track of the names of anyone arrested, for cross-referencing, and these were the only three hits."

"One more thing, if you don't mind," Marasi said as they prepared to leave. "Can you find any reports of food shipments vanishing? Particularly nonperishable items?"

"Oh, that's been happening steadily for two years now," the lead researcher said. "Captain Blantach has us watching for such reports, as she finds it baffling. Why would the city's criminal underground be so interested in *canned beans*?"

"Why indeed," Marasi said, lifting up a sheet from the lawsuit documents. Where Copper had claimed, *Someone is building shelters against a cataclysm, maintained by inexplicable technology. The city government is in on it, and so were my employers! They fired me because I got too close to the truth. You have to listen. They're splitting harmonium, and once they do, they'll make bombs to turn us into turtles.*

That … last part seemed a little far-fetched.

The researchers vanished out the door, leaving Marasi and Wax to read over the three documents in turn. Unfortunately, it *wasn't* a lot to go on. The blotter said that after Tobal Copper had calmed, they'd released him. He had not reoffended.

The last sheet gave an address in an area the researcher said was expensive. Marasi supposed a head chemist would be paid well.

"They probably killed him," Wax said softly, "once the hubbub died down—so it wouldn't look too suspicious."

"Possibly," Marasi said. "But it's equally likely they grabbed him to make him work on their projects."

"Death said he vanished two weeks ago," Wax said. "This trail might be cold already."

"But it's the best one we have," Marasi said.

"Agreed. Kim, do you know where this apartment address is located?"

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The apartment building didn’t look much like a plateau.

Wayne stood with the others, hands on his hips, staring up at the thing. It was too shiny, with too many windows—like a big bottle of something expensive. Buildings shouldn’t look like that; they should look like bricks. And have alleys that smelled of what came out of a fellow after he’d had a bottle of something too expensive.

Most of all, he’d expected a plateau.

No, wait, he realized. *There’s a canyon next. That’s how the story goes. We gotta find that first.*

Comforted, he followed Marasi, Wax, and that Kim woman who tried too hard to be fiddly. The foyer had a doorman and everything. This place *was* fancy. Maybe Wayne should buy a building like that. A doorman sure would be helpful in carrying him up to his flat after *he*’d had too many bottles of something expensive.

Or, well, more often he had bottles of something cheap as piss. Just because he was secretly rich and posh didn’t mean he couldn’t appreciate terrible booze anymore. He merely had to call it “retro” or “authentic” or something.

The doorman sent for the building manager, who turned out to be a man shaped kind of like a brick—so that was a nice nod to proper building protocol. Marasi and Wax explained they needed to investigate the missing man’s apartment, while Wayne took a long walk around the foyer with its enormous paintings of people dancing. They wore suits and dresses, their legs stretched really long, their backs all straight, as if they were made of rulers and not flesh.

Was this the canyon from the story? Ma had said it was beautiful. But no. This didn't work. No self-respecting canyon would have pictures of dancing folks on the walls.

And why did he assume this would be like the story? Well, because he'd thought of it, he supposed. Once you had a thought, you had to keep ahold of it. That was how things was.

The building manager listened to Wax and Marasi's explanations, squinted at Kim's credentials, then grunted. He pointed the way to the elevator, and they all squeezed in.

Wayne didn't much like elevators. It wasn't just being trapped in a little box, or not knowin' how it worked and needin' to rely upon an operator. It wasn't that you could smell everyone a little too much when pressed together, or couldn't see where you were going, which ruined the experience of going up high.

Wait. No, it probably *was* that last one. Elevators were like a carnival ride designed by an overprotective parent who didn't want you getting scared or actually having any fun. He'd had more faith in them when they'd been moved by people, not electricity. Folks were overly trusting of this strange power what leaked from sockets in the walls. After all, Wayne was a primary investor in the technology, and that should have been a big red flag for everyone.

On the twenty-second floor, at the end of a long hallway, the building manager used a set of keys to open a door into a large apartment. He gestured for them to enter, with a grunt.

"Anyone else been in here?" Wax asked.

"No," the manager said.

"He's been gone for two weeks," Wax said. "And nobody came looking? No constables? No family?"

The manager shook his head, grunted, then left them—apparently wanting nothing to do with constables.

"Wonder what his problem is," Marasi said, shutting the door behind them.

“Dunno,” Wayne said. “But whatever he has, at least it seems noncommunicative.”

Wax walked to the center of the room. One wall had narrow floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city, with steel girders between. The wall to its right was filled with bookshelves. There was a stylish sitting area to the left, with a smart yellow rug and black furniture. Everything was exceptionally neat, though keeping your place clean was probably easy when you was either dead or vanished.

“So,” Marasi said, “they grabbed him or killed him. Then left this apartment alone and visibly pristine. Trap?”

“Trap,” Wax said, with a nod. “Give me a minute to use Allomancy to scan about.”

Turned out it’s really tough to make an explosive trap without *some* metal, even using modern clay explosives. They found three tripwires and one pressure plate, each hooked to a doozy of a grenade. The Set evidently didn’t care about a little collateral damage.

“So, whoever you’re chasing,” Kim said, wringing her hands nervously, “they got here before us. Rusts. I didn’t know what I was in for…”

“They were undoubtedly behind Copper’s disappearance,” Wax said. “Be careful, everyone. There might be a trap we missed. Kim, would you encourage anyone in the neighboring apartments to leave for the next hour?”

She left to do so, and the rest of them set to some familiar work: going over a scene for clues. Kim returned a short time later while Wayne was inspecting the writing desk near the bookshelves. She knelt down beside him, looking up at the bottom as he knocked for secret compartments.

“Um…” she said, still acting uncertain, “I did as you asked. But … why are we bothering to search? Your enemy has been over this place thoroughly.”

“Sure,” Wayne said. “I can even prove it. See these little drill holes? You make those to be *extra* sure there’s no secret compartments, but only if you want to leave the furniture in one piece. Which is less fun … but sometimes there are good reasons. Like if you want the room to look normal to a bunch of constables when they visit, so they'll be more likely to get themselves exploded."

"So what is there to learn?"

"Well, you see, this is a kind of fight," Wayne said. "A back-and-forth. A dance. They set those traps in case someone dangerous got wind of the Set. You don't need to blow up ordinary constables. Just the *extra*ordinary kind."

"Like you?"

"Hell no," Wayne said, then pointed to Marasi, searching through books, then to Wax, knocking against the far wall and listening for compartments. "You see those two? They represent the best of two worlds. Wax, now, he's instinct. He's lived a lot, been shot at a lot. He didn't have the schooling to be a constable—he spent his school years learning from Terris scholars about old things people wrote a long time ago.

"But Marasi, she's knowledge. She's spent her life *studying* how to do this sort of nonsense. Sometimes I think she must have read more books on being a constable than have ever actually been written. She talks of crime patterns, preventing chains of poverty, and smart things what make you think maybe being a constable is about *math.*

"Put the two of them together, and you've got both. Instinct and knowledge. Practice and application. The enemy, they looked this place over, sure. They had first crack at it. But they left bombs. That whispers that they're worried they missed something. And so the dance, the fight. Can *we* find what they didn't?"

"Curious," she said. "And what do you add to the team?"

"Comic relief."

She cocked an eyebrow.

"Maybe a little whimsy," he said. "Improvisation. Vision."

"You have a broad imagination, then?"

"There are broads in my imagination almost all the time."

That provoked a smile. Seemed like a nice enough person, when she wasn't pretending. Course, she was probably a traitor of some sort. Shame about that.

"Hey, Wax," Wayne said. "Look at this."

Wax joined him a moment later, inspecting the bottom envelope in a stack from the desk drawer.

"What's that?" Kim asked.

"When you use a fountain pen," Wayne said, "you gotta wait for it to dry. But sometimes you're inna hurry, or you're worried, so you put it away and put something on toppa it. Like this stack of envelopes. Then the ink makes an imprint on the bottom."

"Smudged," Wax said, holding up the envelope. "But maybe legible. This part here, it's underlined. Does that look like a set of numbers to you?"

"A seven?" Wayne asked, pointing at one. The next were too smudged to read. "Then a dash and a thirteen."

"Maybe a combination," Kim said softly, crowding them to see the number. "There are big stacks of lockers at the larger train stations that use numbers like this, where you can pay to store things."

Wax nodded slowly. "Marasi, what have you found?"

"I think these books have all been replaced," she said. "He seems like the type who reads a lot, but these are all brand new. I'd guess the Set took every book in the place, just in case, and refilled the bookshelves with red herrings."

"This looks like the original furniture though," Wax said, and demonstrated moving a chair back so it bumped the wall, right where the paint had been scraped away by repeatedly being hit like that. "It's old. Worn. The carpet too. The room *appears* neat and orderly, because the Set cleaned it up after they did their search—but it was likely a mess before they arrived."

"I think the fellow is dead," Wayne said, tapping the wall and breaking away some putty. "Bullet hole. Probably shot the poor doof in the back while he was sitting here."

"Too specific a conclusion to draw from so little evidence," Marasi said, joining him. She pulled out a little brush and fiddled in the hole, eventually pulling out some flakes of something and putting them in a vial.

"Blood?" Wayne guessed.

"Yes," she admitted. "And what might be a sliver of bone. They must have cleaned the blood off the desk, but removed only the bullet from the hole.” She ran her fingers over the wood. “It’s worn down. He used this desk a lot. Or bought an old one to begin with. Hard to say.”

Wax walked over and handed Wayne a leather cap, like painters wore.

“Found it on the bedpost,” Wax said. “What do you think? Have we given you enough to work with?”

“Maybe…” Wayne said, slipping on the hat. He walked to the center of the room, then stared out a window, putting it all together. Trying to imagine the man who had lived here, trying to extrapolate from what they knew of him.

“He was respected at first,” Wayne said. “A good scientist. But then he found things, heard other things, learned more. He was a chemist, right?”

“For a tire company,” Marasi said.

“A front, most likely,” Wax said. “He said his employers were making a bomb. I’d bet his chemistry work involved investigating weapon systems and explosives for the Bilming government.”

“Yeah…” Wayne said, his eyes closed. “He realized they were looking to make a bomb, and heard about splitting harmonium. And he was maybe already a little eccentric. He tried to save the city … But he was an odd fellow, and nobody listened…”

Eyes closed, he spread his arms out and turned around slowly, smelling the place—and imagining it. Stacked old dishes in the corner. He could still smell them. Frantic nights … reading … thinking …

“They didn’t listen,” Wayne said. “And when they locked him up, he learned he couldn’t use the normal justice system to stop the disaster.”

“So what did he do?” Kim asked. “You think the people who killed him were scared that they missed something. That implies he knew something they didn’t want leaked. Where did he stash it?”

“He didn’t,” Wayne whispered. “That’s not what this fellow would do. You see, the Set … they’re going to be wrong about him. Just like Kim is.”

“How?” Marasi asked softly from somewhere to his right.

“The Set,” Wayne said, “they hold on to knowledge. They *strangle* it, Marasi. But a fellow like this, he might be a little unhinged, but he wants people to know what *he* knows. He ain’t going to lock his ideas up in some train station. He’ll *share* them. If the government won’t listen, then…”

He opened his eyes and met Wax's. "… he'll do whatever he can to get the information out."

"Kim," Wax said, thoughtful, "which local broadsheet has the worst reputation? The type that publishes whatever nonsense it can get its hands on? Particularly if it's frightening, or a little off-kilter?"

"There are at *least* seven of those," she replied.

"Which one syndicates the writings of that fool Jak?"

"The *Sentinel of Truth,*" she said. "I … kind of love those…" She seemed embarrassed, but she needn't be. Those were good stories. Super dumb, of course, but sometimes you needed cheap storytelling with your cheap booze. Didn't make no sense to read literature while drinking outta a paper sack.

"*Sentinel of Truth*…" Wax said. "Do you know the address of their offices?"

"I can look it up," Kim said, digging out one of her volumes of city addresses.

Wayne took off the hat and held it lightly. The poor fellow, Tobal Copper, *was* dead. He hadn't let the Set push him around or force him to work for them. They'd come here to learn what he knew about them and their plans, and they hadn't left him alive. But maybe he'd told someone. Someone the Set hadn't been able to find—because letting go of information, to them, would be inconceivable.

"I've got it," Kim said. "Publishing offices of the *Sentinel* can be found at…" She looked up. "Seventh Street. Office 42–13. Nights! The same numbers you found on the bottom of the envelope."

Wax squeezed him on the arm. "Nice work, Wayne."

He shrugged. "It's easy enough when you have a lot to work with."

"That was a lot?" Kim asked, curious.

"Sure," Wayne said, tucking the hat away. "A man's whole life."

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Steris took a long, deep breath. It was the sort of thing she'd read about for calming nerves. She'd seen Marasi do it during stressful situations. Did it work? Steris wasn't certain. But the act was very normal, wasn't it?

She took another deep breath in case she'd done it wrong, letting it out slowly. Then she stepped into the Senate's main assembly hall to be assaulted by noise and chaos. The two were so often partners.

Senators shouted across the chamber at each other. Aides fluttered about, delivering afternoon broadsheets and private reports to their senators. She'd been able to acquire a few of these—not actual broadsheets from Bilming, but local reprints or summaries received via telegraph. Emergency editions were common with big stories, each paper rushing to capitalize.

They wouldn't be the most accurate stories. But they could certainly start fires. She glanced at a few as she walked past.

CONSTABLES DEAD! BOTCHED ELENDEL OPERATION LEADS TO BILMING TRAGEDY!

SECRET ELENDEL CONSTABLE FORCE UNDERMINES LOCAL POLICING EFFORTS!

EARLY ACT OF WAR PLACES ELENDEL FORCES IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO BILMING LAW ENFORCEMENT! SHOTS FIRED! SEVENTEEN DEAD!

The spins were different, but the flavors were similar. Waxillium had drawn attention as usual, and she had no doubt that most of the casualties were members of the Set. That wasn't a nuance for headlines. Still, she had sent her children out of the city with Kath. She prayed to the Survivor that they were safe in their grandfather's estate to the south.

For now, Steris pushed through the cacophony, steeling herself against the fluttering of pages, the tumult of words, and made her way to the vice governor's seat. There Steris delivered the proper authorization form for her to take her husband's position in the Senate.

Adawathwyn said nothing about the dire letter Steris had sent earlier, detailing the threat to the city. Why? Did they dismiss her that easily?

People never wanted to listen to Steris. They preferred to nod along and think about other things. She made her way to Wax's seat—her seat. Wax was correct; standing for House Ladrian was her right. Indeed, it was one of the main reasons they'd initially explored a union. Her fortune; his authority. Together they could do great things.

If she could keep her nerve. Yes, she'd taken his spot before, but never for something so vital. So, she stood at the small desk, surrounded by chaos. She'd prepared for this. She'd written down what it would be like. She'd even taken two deep breaths. Yes, her heart thundered in her chest, insisting she was nervous, but what did her heart know? It had spent years insisting she'd never fall in love, and it had been so very wrong. Her heart was no expert in what she couldn't do. It only knew what she had and hadn't done.

As she'd hoped, people noticed her there, standing silently, and some of the arguments dropped off. This allowed Adawathwyn to shout for quiet in the room—and finally be heard. Her forceful tone, unusual for a Terriswoman, brought order at last. Like a teakettle moved from the burner, senators stopped boiling, but remained hot—settling in their seats and muttering softly.

"The governor," Adawathwyn said, "requests an explanation from the acting senator of House Ladrian."

Every eye in the room turned to Steris. Well, she was accustomed to that. People did tend to stare at her. Or glare. Or glower. It depended on how wrong they were, and what level of annoyed they were at hearing her point it out.

"My husband," she said to the room, "has been called back to his duties as a lawman because of a particularly dangerous situation in Bilming. His operation was fully approved by the constables-general, under the authority of the governor himself. Your Grace, everything my husband has done has been strictly legal and documented."

"Sometimes," the governor said, "it doesn't matter if the permissions are in place and the documents prepared. An act can still be improper."

What? *How dare he!* That was the very *definition* of proper! Steris forced down her anger. Some people … just thought that way.

She covertly glanced at her note card. She had determined, after deliberating all morning, that she'd need to get the governor into a small-group setting. She didn't want to panic the city, and didn't yet know how urgent the timing was.

She still needed to get a plan in place for evacuating the city. Always plan for the worst. So: get the governor into a more private conversation. In the proper circumstances, he could authorize an evacuation of the city without a Senate vote.

"Your Grace," she said to the governor, "Constable-General Reddi has information of relevance about my husband's mission. I sent him reports with details of my fears this morning. We are facing a far larger issue, even, than the growing intercity aggression. I therefore move that a select council be formed to deal with the emergency in an immediate and timely manner."

A Governor's Select Council would be a small commission—in this case made up of a handful of senators and at least one constable-general—with a limited remit. In the past, they had been used for smaller-scale matters, such as addressing traffic needs in the city hub. But a select council was a potent tool, allowing a concentration of power in a few specific individuals. She was shocked it hadn't been used for an emergency before now; a thorough reading of the law made the application obvious.

"Wait," the governor asked, "is that … allowed? I thought those committees were for choosing flowers at grand openings and the like."

The vice governor grabbed him by the arm and pulled him down, where they conversed in quiet, hissing tones—eventually calling over a legal clerk. Several others in the room did likewise.

The governor stood up. "This seems an excellent suggestion," he said, sounding surprised. "Motion to vote on creating a select council on this matter with Bilming?" He pointedly looked toward a few senators in the room—including Lord Darlin Cett, a man with slicked-back, thinning hair.

The Cetts were among the more powerful faction leaders in this incarnation of the government, and the look seemed to say, "You'll be included in this council if you vote for it." It was a shrewd move for the governor, which likely meant he hadn't come up with it himself.

For once, the Senate vote gave Steris the result she'd been hoping for. A select council was to be formed at the governor's discretion, granted authority for twenty-four hours to deal with the crisis at Bilming.

"Lord Cett," the governor said, "Lady Hammondess, and Lady Gardre. Please join me and Adawathwyn in the governor's chambers to strategize until Constable-General Reddi arrives. The rest of the Senate is adjourned."

Steris hesitated. He hadn't called on her. Was … that an oversight? Was it implied that she'd join him, or …

Or was he leaving her out?

Oh, *rusts.* How could she have missed such a natural possibility? She called for a select council, but then wasn't included in it? She should have seen that coming.

She put her hand to her head, feeling hot and ashamed of herself. The woman who was ready for everything, blindsided by such an obvious move.

As she tried to control her nausea, someone stood up at the back of the chamber—from the observation seats. A figure in a sharp wooden mask painted with red lines. "Your Grace," the Malwish ambassador said, "I should very much like to observe the workings of this council."

"Um, Admiral Daal?" the governor said. "This is a matter of internal Basin affairs."

"Yes, which is exactly why I want to observe," the ambassador said. "I can learn much about a people by how they react to a crisis. I have a pleasure craft, of a personal ownership, docked in the city. Perhaps you would find it useful to borrow, my lord governor? To observe the Basin."

The governor blinked. "Well," he said, "I'm sure the wisdom of a battle-hardened admiral would be of great use to our council. Come on, then."

Oh, rusts. Had he really taken such an obvious bribe? In public? The action cut through Steris's shame, and she glanced toward Adawathwyn.

The vice governor had her palm to her face. She'd have to work hard to spin that exchange. But, well, one of the problems with having a pushover like Varlance as governor was that others were fully capable of pushing too.

You can push, Steris thought at herself. *You have to try.*

Ignoring her instincts—which wanted her to sit down and write out how she could have foreseen this situation—Steris hopped out of her seat and ran to the floor, shoving unceremoniously between a pair of senators to reach the governor.

"Your Grace," she said. "I believe I can offer relevant insight to this council."

"Oh!" he said, glancing toward her. "Lady Ladrian?" He then looked to the side, where Adawathwyn shook her head sharply. "Alas," the governor said, turning back to Steris, "I feel the council is already crowded. It was wonderful of you to make the suggestion though."

"Your Grace," she said. "There is a *dire threat* to the city. You need to hear me out."

The governor hesitated.

"She sent a letter about this earlier in the morning, Your Honor," Adawathwyn said. "Some nonsense about a bomb capable of destroying Elendel."

"What is this?" he said, turning toward his vice governor.

"It's true," Steris said. "You didn't even give it to him?"

"Your house has a history of inflating problems," Adawathwyn said. "Remember the time your husband claimed that voting against his workers' rights act would cause an uproar in the city? Or when he insisted the Roughs would form its own country if we continued our tariff plans?"

"This time it's different," Steris said. "He … has confirmation from Harmony."

"I see," Adawathwyn said. "And if Harmony *himself* were going to speak to someone, would he not speak to the *governor*?"

"Has your husband seen a bomb?" the governor asked. "Does he have proof to back up your claims?"

"He's gathering evidence now," Steris said.

“Then,” the governor said, “why not return to us when you have that proof?”

“Because I need to be in that council with you—”

“Lady Ladrian,” he said, softer, “surely you see that this is an important, tense situation. This is not a place for a woman who has been a sitting senator for less than an hour.” He smiled. “Indeed, this situation is going to require delicacy and tact, not…”

Not whatever it is you are, the unfinished sentence seemed to imply. He nodded to her, then joined the others at the door to the governor’s chambers.

Steris was left alone in the center of the floor. Humiliated. She … well, she’d have to make another plan. Yes, plan how to deal with this situation. She could take the rest of the day …

No. She couldn’t afford to spend time planning. She *had* to get into that room.

And in the moment, she thought of one way she might be able to accomplish it.

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The *Sentinel of Truth* broadsheet offices didn't fit Bilming. Unlike the sleek, modern designs, its building looked like a shack. An older wooden structure, only one story, with a peaked roof, bulging walls, and small windows.

"One of the old buildings," Kim explained, "from when this section of town held a lot of fishing shacks. The push to start knocking everything down and build anew came five years ago, but there are structures like this sprinkled throughout the city."

"Doesn't seem like it's been in operation lately," Wax said, noting the padlock on the door, the dark interior. "Is it still publishing?"

"Releases have been sporadic lately," Kim said. "I had to wait *six weeks* to read the end of the 'Survivor's Last Testament' arc of Jak's explorations."

Rusting idiot man, Wax thought. Ever since the discovery of the "Sovereign" who had ruled and helped the people of the Southern lands, Survivor fervor had been at a high point. Sightings all over the city, particularly on misty nights.

Jak, of course, had capitalized on this and had spent years "discovering" Survivor artifacts in his adventures. It wouldn't be half as bad if the fool didn't mention Wax now and then.

They knocked at a side door, and when they got no reply they tried the door and found it locked. So Wax wrapped a coat tassel around his fist and prepared to smash in the window.

“Wax?” Marasi said. “What are you doing?”

“Beginning an investigation.”

“Let’s wait a few minutes,” she said. “See if the owner returns.”

He stopped, his fist a few inches from the glass. “We have a writ of investigation. We can break in.”

“If it’s an emergency,” she said. “And if we’ve tried other options. This is a private citizen’s property, and we have no reason to believe the Set is here. And unlike the apartment earlier, we have no reason to believe a crime has been committed.”

“Let me do it,” Wayne said, walking up to the window. “You can all say you tried to stop me, but I done pulled a Wayne. They’ll let you off.”

“It’s not about what we can get away with, Wayne,” Marasi said, putting her hand to her face. “It’s about proper procedure. You can’t just smash into any place you want to—the world is changing. People have rights. It makes our job harder, but it makes the world better.”

Wax frowned, lowering his hand.

“We can afford to wait a few minutes,” Marasi said. “If we’re right, we want whoever owns this place to work with us—and breaking in might turn them against us. If we’re wrong, then we’ll have ransacked someone’s place of business for nothing.” She glanced at the sun. “It’s lunchtime. The owner might be out—they are still putting out papers, after all, so we have reason to think they’ll show up for work eventually.”

Wax reluctantly backed down. He expected Wayne to complain, but the shorter man just shrugged and jogged over to a street corner food stand to get something to eat. Marasi and Kim settled down on a bench beside a small nearby park, leaving Wax to put his back to a well-groomed tree set into a little piece of earth with a low fence around it.

Moments like this made him feel old. Not just of body, but of mind. He seemed to represent something that was dying. The lone lawman. And … well, it was hard to mourn. Because intellectually, he agreed with Marasi. He’d voted for legal restrictions on constable authority. Society needed robust checks on everyone’s power. Even his. *Especially* his.

But at the same time, that made the world seem too big to fix. Out in the Roughs he could beat in a door and talk—or sometimes shoot—sense into anyone who needed it. It had made him feel like he could solve basically any problem.

But that had been a false impression of control, hadn't it? Acknowledging that made him uncomfortable. It wasn't that the world was growing more complicated. It was that he was letting himself see it had always been complicated.

A minute later, Wax heard something. He *swore* it came from the building. He narrowed his eyes, burning steel, tracking the blue lines around him to a few moving near the top of the building. An attic? He raised a hand to the others, then slipped out Vindication. Someone was up there. He was certain of it. Had they simply not heard the calls earlier?

He dropped a bullet casing and launched off it, then landed carefully on the roof near where the shingles sloped past a small attic window, shuttered closed. Quiet though he'd tried to be, the metal lines moved sharply right as he landed—then they stilled. Mostly. They were quivering.

He narrowed his eyes at the window. One of the shutter corners was broken, letting whoever was inside peek out. He could see a metal line leading right to the hole. A part of him felt cold, because that metal was almost certainly a gun pointed at him. Shingles rattled under his feet as he engaged his steel bubble—the subtle Push he'd learned to use to deflect bullets. It made the nails in the rooftop vibrate as they tried to escape the field.

Vibrating, he thought, *like that line ahead of me. That's a gun in the hands of someone who is trembling.*

He wasn't facing a Set assassin. Carefully, he raised his gun to the side, pointed away from the window.

"I'm a constable," he said loudly. "I'm here to help."

Silence. Then finally a voice. Feminine, husky. "You're here to kill me. Like you killed Tobal."

"No," Wax said. "I promise it." He stepped forward. "I'm looking for the people who killed him. If I were here for another reason, I'd have shot instead of spoken."

More silence. Long enough to unnerve him, until finally the shutters swung open, revealing a short woman. She had frizzy grey-black hair and a disheveled appearance—a waistcoat buttoned with a few holes skipped, a long skirt that was rumpled as if it spent most of its life in a heap in a corner. She had dark bags under her eyes and a wan appearance, as if she'd been heavier once but had lost weight, like a couch missing some of its stuffing.

"You…" she said, lowering a rifle. "Are you … Dawnshot?"

"That's me," he said, relaxing.

She brightened. "You're *Jak's* friend!"

Jak's friend? Just because that idiot brought up Wax's name once in a while? He opened his mouth to object, but thought better of it.

"I … know of him," Wax said. "Look, something is happening in this city. Something very dangerous. I followed the trail to Tobal's apartment, then here. Please. Did he give you something? Tell you something?"

She leaned out, suspiciously scanning the streets. "Meet me below, at the back." She pulled the shutters closed, and he joined Marasi and Kim at the back doors as they rattled, numerous locks and chains being undone.

Finally, she pulled the door open. "I don't normally talk to conners. Ever."

"'S good advice," Wayne mumbled through a mouthful of something. He walked up beside Wax and took another bite of what appeared to be grease and maybe some bits of meat wrapped in what might have been bread. Or a very large crepe?

"But since you're friends of Jak…" she said.

"Sure are," Wayne said, slapping Wax on the shoulder. "Jak and Wax here adventured together out in the Roughs!"

"I guess, then," she said, gesturing for them to enter, "you're not *that* kind of constable. You're the *other* kind."

"Yup," Wayne said. "*We're* the kind what don't like uniforms and shoots people when they try to make us sign paperwork." He took another bite of his wrap.

"What even is that?" Wax asked as Marasi and Kim entered.

"He called it 'chouta.' It's good."

"It looks disgusting."

"Aw, mate. With street food, that's how you *know* it's good."

The building inside was musty and dark, and had numerous trash bins by the door—as if the woman hadn't dared leave to empty them. She watched Wax, rifle in hand—though not raised—as if certain he'd turn on her at any moment.

"Is … Jak in the city?" she asked. "Available to help?"

"I … um…" Wax said. "No. He's on … an adventure."

"Don't suppose you can send for him?" she sounded hopeful.

"Afraid not."

She frowned, eyeing him.

"Oh, don't mind Dawnshot," Wayne said, nudging Wax. "He gets coy about Jak sometimes." He leaned toward the woman. "Honestly, he's a little jealous."

"Well, who wouldn't be?" she said, then sighed and began doing up the locks on the door. "Has he ever let you hold the Spear of the Red Sun?"

Wayne looked at Wax, who gritted his teeth. "No," he forced himself to say. "It's too powerful. Jak says I might accidentally awaken some … zombies if I'm allowed to touch it."

The woman nodded, locks secured, then waved for them to follow her into the building.

"Good," Wayne whispered to Wax. "But the spear wasn't used for zombies. They was on the Island of Death, with Nicki."

"How do *you* know?" Wax hissed to him.

"I read every one," Wayne said. "Why wouldn't I?"

"You…"

"I thought you couldn't read," Marasi said, brushing past them and following the woman.

"Oh, I can read," Wayne said. "But I'm dumb, see, so I can only read things what are dumb too."

The woman led them through a corridor crowded with books—stacks of them, taking up almost every available space. In the next room were a large printing press, some buckets of ink, and boxes of lead type scattered about. Her picture on the wall, hanging askew and showing her in younger years, was captioned MARAGA DULCET, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

“So,” she said, running a hand through her disheveled hair, “you know who killed Tobal? Was it those people with the golden hair living on the east side? They’re some kind of fairy creature; I know it.”

“Actually,” Marasi said, “we think it was a secretive group plotting to start up the Ashmounts again—and we worry they’re working to create bombs of incredible power.”

Maraga nodded. “So you do know.”

That was a test, Wax realized.

Maraga opened a doorway that revealed a set of old steps. “Well then. Follow me.”

She led the way down and Wax followed, waving for Marasi and Kim to stay back a few feet. The air smelled of old potatoes, spiders, and forgotten jars of something that might have once been preserves. Maraga flipped a switch at the bottom, powering a set of electric lights swinging on wires.

Covering the walls of the musty basement room were sheets of metal, scratched in detail—filled with words and diagrams, letters and pictures all cramped up together.

“Figured we’d write it all in metal,” Maraga said. “Just in case.”

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Eyes wide with wonder, Marasi walked around the basement. It seemed to have once been used for storage, judging by the piles of old equipment and stacked throw mats. This had all been pushed away from the walls to make room for the metal sheets.

The Words of Founding mentioned metal plates, and Marasi had imagined large, thick sheets with the words chiseled in bold, powerful letters. Instead, Maraga had scratched sheets of tin with a pen, often scribbling out sentences and lines she got wrong. A lot of it was organized as lists. It had a frenzied air to it, but not like—say—the ravings of a madman. More like …

Notes, Marasi thought. *A journalist's shorthand notes, connecting ideas and building a story.*

Maraga slumped down on the bottom step, seeming exhausted. "I … didn't believe him at first," she whispered. "Tobal. Thought he was another crackpot. But they usually have a good story to tell, something my readers want to hear.

"Then he started to bring me evidence. Information he stole from his employers. I think he was sneaking back in, grabbing ledgers, scraps, whatever he could find … Never would let me help. He didn't want me to get too involved." She looked up at the walls. "As if this weren't already enough to get me killed…"

Marasi walked closer to offer comfort, but the woman flinched. There was a … fatalistic air about her. The air of a woman who had thrown the dice and was waiting to see how the numbers came up.

“How long?” Wax asked, inspecting one of the plates.

“Almost four years,” Maraga whispered. “Like I said, I didn’t believe him at first. But I’ve always been interested in the stories that slip through the cracks. The ones other papers ignore because they seem too sensational, or too lowbrow.”

“Lies, you mean,” Wax said. “You print lies.”

“We prefer ‘whimsical what-ifs.’ Intriguing stories that would be fascinating if they were true.”

“So…” Wax said, “lies.”

“Our patrons understand what they’re buying, Lord Ladrian,” Maraga said, lifting her chin. “You know. You’re friends with Jak himself. It’s all about being larger than life, bigger than reality! Our patrons know we stretch to find the more interesting tidbits, the ‘might’s and the ‘could-be’s of the world.”

He shook his head, obviously unconvinced.

Maraga sniffed. “I did my journeymanship at the *Times,* top paper in the city. Totally respectable. The amount they fudged, slanted, or outright fabricated would scandalize you. At least *I’m* honest about it. Besides, I don’t print lies. I print human-interest stories—the tales of people who are ignored by the larger media. Exciting stories, by adventuring celebrities. Cartoons, pictures of funny-shaped vegetables…”

“How funny?” Wayne said from across the room.

“Depends on your sense of humor,” Maraga replied.

“Crass. With a light seasoning of vulgarity.”

“Second box on the left,” she said. “Next to your foot.”

Wayne located the appropriate box, which was filled with sketches. In seconds he was snickering to himself.

“Anyway,” Maraga continued, “the more Tobal brought, and the more I pieced together, the more terrified I became. This … was a story. A *real* story. Not a whimsical tale about bug men or the dangers of electricity. This … this could get people killed. Could get *me* killed.”

She looked up at them, then continued. “Once I believed, we worked for many months, putting all of this together. I started to see things he didn’t.

Tobal wasn’t … completely credible. He jumped to conclusions. But he wasn’t wrong, not at the heart of the story. And he hadn’t made it up.

“He told me that one day he wouldn’t show up to our nightly conversation. He said, when that happened, I should run. Take everything to the authorities. But the authorities are involved, so … what then? Who to tell? And then, two weeks ago, he didn’t show up. One night. Two. Three … And I knew. I *knew.* They’d found him.”

“I’m sorry,” Marasi said.

“Could he still be alive?” Maraga asked. “Might they have just … taken him?”

“It’s possible,” Marasi said. “But … we don’t think it’s likely.”

Maraga nodded, looking down at her feet. Then she closed her eyes and seemed to be waiting. For what?

For the dice to land, Marasi realized. *She doesn’t trust us. She’s waiting to see if we shoot.*

Marasi looked around the room and noticed that Wayne—despite pretending to look at the pictures—was actually watching Moonlight, one hand resting lazily on his dueling cane. Likely with his metals ready, just in case she tried something. Even Wax was watching her from the corner of his eye.

“This is brilliant,” Moonlight said instead, staring at one of the walls. “Are these … trajectory estimations?”

Marasi joined her beside one set of sketches in tin, which depicted looping arcs. Moonlight was right; it looked like measurements with different estimates of how far a shot could reach.

Maraga stood up, seeming to take strength from the question. “That’s right,” she said. “Those numbers are the distances the Bilming military *claim* their new guns can fire. They love to send releases to the local broadsheets, extolling their grand navy. It’s mostly bravado. They imply they could shell Elendel from twenty miles away, but that’s a lie. The guns are much shorter range than that.”

“And this?” Marasi asked, pointing at another set of trajectories.

“Poor Tobal’s job was to research chemical propellants,” Maraga replied. At their confused stares, she continued. “These people, they’re trying to develop self-propelled shells. Weapons that could fire *themselves* and fly miles. Or even hundreds of miles. Before hitting and detonating."

Rusts, Marasi thought, her eyes widening. She walked through the room, taking in each of the eight large plates on the walls. She identified one having to do with the "subway" systems of the city, a large interconnected cavern complex that was being "surveyed" to determine where to place train lines. But the truth, according to Maraga's notes, was entirely different—the surveys were seeking caverns that could offer stable underground living conditions.

They're preparing bunkers, Marasi thought. *That's what the supplies are for—they're stocking up for a cataclysm, perhaps?*

Just as people had sought refuge in caverns during the last days before the world ended. Before Harmony's Ascension and the remaking of the land.

"This doesn't make *sense,*" Wax said, joining her. "Harmony says my sister is trying to prove she can rule this planet. If she blows it up, what does that prove? Why build bunkers? Does she honestly think that saving a fragment of us and annihilating the rest would prove her competence?"

"I don't know," Marasi admitted, then pointed at another plate. "This talks about ashfalls. The days of ash and destruction allowed the Lord Ruler to secure near-universal power, at least in the North. So maybe Telsin thinks that would work again?"

"You should read the next plate over," Maraga said.

Together they stepped to the side, reading what appeared to be a list of names. "Dupon Melstrom…" Wax read. "Vennis Hasting … Mari Hammondess … These are some of the most powerful senators in Elendel."

"They're in on it," Maraga said.

"What?" Marasi said, spinning. "All of them?"

Maraga dug in a cabinet and came out with a piece of paper. She handed it to Marasi, who showed it to Wax. A letter from Vennis Hasting, talking about the creation of a bomb of incredible power. It was dated almost a year ago, and implicated many of the names on the wall.

Marasi frowned. That … that seemed impossible. This many people in their *own government* knew? Could the Set have its fingers wrapped that tightly around the Basin? She looked at Wax.

“I know some of these people,” he said. “Vennis is a rat, of course—but Lady Yomen is a good friend. As close a senator as I trust. This doesn’t add up, Marasi. *None* of this adds up.”

“Maybe that’s why the Senate is so confident,” she said, “that they can bully the Outer Cities.”

“I know these people,” Wax said. “They wouldn’t keep a secret like this; they *couldn’t*. Everything they’ve done so far has been about posturing for power. The Supremacy Bill, the tariffs, the ‘hard line’ they’re taking with the South … If Vennis knew about a bomb, he’d be advocating for strategic tests to prove how powerful it is.”

“They could all be in the Set,” Marasi said softly.

His expression darkened. He took the letter, staring at it, and she knew what he was thinking: if the Set’s tendrils ran this deep—even into the hearts of his friends among the senators …

“No,” he said. “There’s something very strange here, Marasi. If my sister had all of these people following her dictates, she would *already* rule the Basin. We’re missing a big piece of this.”

Moonlight walked up to them, nodding toward another of the plates. “You’re talking about a bomb? Well, it seems they have one—look at this.”

Marasi and Wax walked over, finding another plate with a list of underground disturbances. It was labeled with the words “Underground weapon tests, tracked using seismograph.”

“They’ve developed an underground base beneath the city,” Maraga said. “It’s where they hide. Lord Mayor Entrone is involved, is probably even one of their leaders. Some of the caverns seem to be weapons testing locations, but others are bunkers they’re preparing for some reason and using as a headquarters.”

“They stopped the tests recently,” Moonlight said. “Wonder why?”

“Well…” Maraga said. “They know it works. I mean, they’re well past their go date.”

“Go date?” Marasi asked, feeling cold.

“Stolen internal memos,” Maraga said, pointing to a plate. “Don’t know how he got them. Listing target dates for project completion. The weapon was supposed to be detonated two weeks ago." Maraga slumped back down onto the steps. "They killed him the day before that. I thought for sure the end would come soon after …

"I…" She buried her head in her hands. "I know I should have published this. I'm a coward. In the end, I'm a *coward.* I've been hunkered up here, waiting for the ash to fall, haven't I? Rusts. I was convinced no one would listen … Convinced it was too late…"

"What is done, or not done, is past," Wax said, firm. "We have the information now. And there's still time to stop this."

"Wax," Marasi hissed, taking his arm. "They have a bomb, and are planning—as far as we can determine—to detonate it in Elendel. They would have done it already, if they could figure out how to get it into the city."

Maraga nodded. "Their self-propelled weapon—the rocket, they call it—is having difficulties. Fuel might be the problem. It's what Tobal was working on for them before he realized what they were planning…" She stood up and steeled herself. "I need to show you one more thing." She hurried to some boxes and dug through them as Moonlight unabashedly took rubbings of the plates.

Maraga dug out an evanotype photo. "The crowning jewel," she said softly. "My best piece of evidence. The above-the-fold photo for the story I'll never actually write…"

Marasi took it, frowning at Wax, who joined her. It depicted an ashen landscape. In color.

Marasi gasped softly, looking at the stark orange sky, the floating ash, the remnants of a ruined city in the distance. That looked … kind of like Elendel, though the ash was heaped so high, obscuring all but the tops of the smoldering, broken buildings and jagged destroyed walls.

"How…" Marasi said. "How can you have a *picture* of the end of the world?"

"They didn't have evanotypes in the Survivor's day," Wax said, looking closely. "The colors are remarkable. Did someone take an old photo and paint onto it?"

“I don’t know,” Maraga said. “But it seems like a picture of … of what is *going* to happen. After he found this, Tobal started to get really scared. He barely stayed during our last visits. I think he mostly just huddled in his rooms until they got him. Like … like I’ve been doing.”

The basement fell silent, even Wayne sensing the mood and covering up any snickering at his funny pictures. Marasi felt a mounting horror at the sight of that picture. She’d heard Wax talk about a bomb, knew what the enemy was trying to build. Laying it out in stark depiction, however, changed it from abstract to concrete.

This was what they wanted to do. Wipe out everything she loved. Leave rubble and ash in its place. These were bigger stakes by far than any investigation she’d ever done. And the implications of it left her disquieted on a profound level.

She turned around, looking at the plates reflecting the calm electric light. Something ancient. Something new. Just like the picture Wax handed back to her.

A door opened upstairs.

The locks had been fastened, but that didn’t stop whoever had arrived. Wayne scrambled to his feet, hands going to his dueling canes as a single set of footsteps crossed the wooden floor up above.

Wax slid a gun from its holster and positioned himself to watch the steps. A figure descended onto the stairs. A woman with dark hair and a rugged build that seemed in conflict with her small nose and prim lips. She wore a suit: slacks, buttoned white shirt, jacket and cravat.

Telsin. Wax’s sister, leader of the Set. She wasn’t armed, at least not in a way that Marasi could make out. And she didn’t seem to mind that Wax had a gun pointed at her head while Wayne backed away, muttering.

“An address,” Telsin said. “The number on the back of the envelope was a rusting *address*? Do you know how many hours we wasted tearing into lockers at train stations?”

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Marasi immediately reached for an Allomantic grenade, charging one silently in her pocket. Wax edged forward, gun on his sister. Wayne had scrambled back from the steps and was muttering to himself, hopping from one foot to the other. He looked around as if he expected enemies to come bursting in through the walls.

Last time they'd seen Telsin, she had betrayed them to the Set. She'd nearly gotten Wax killed, and in return Wayne had fired a shotgun blast at her chest. The first time he'd fired a gun in … well, Marasi didn't know how long.

Telsin had healed, however, vanishing from the bloodied snows where Wayne had left her. She was a Hemalurgist, with at least the power of a Bloodmaker—like Wayne. She had shown hints of two other powers, but it was possible the members of the Set switched out their spikes to gain different Metallic Arts. Regardless, she apparently had enough abilities now that she didn't seem the least bit concerned about facing them alone. Rusts.

"This is marvelous," Telsin said, glancing around the basement. "Remarkable how many of our secrets he managed to sneak out, considering. Who would have thought our greatest danger wasn't armies, constables, or even *you*, Waxillium? It was a miserable, bald old chemist."

"Tobal was a good man!" Maraga said, and ducked behind Wax as Telsin looked toward her.

"Oh, you can lower the gun, Waxillium," Telsin said, settling down on the steps. "The idiot over there will tell you how effective shooting me was.”

“Felt good,” Wayne said. “Does it need to do more than that? Here, Wax. Hand me a gun. I’ll have at it a few more times.”

Wax didn’t move, and Telsin rolled her eyes. They all stood there, Marasi’s grenade vibrating softly in her fingers as it absorbed her power. What now? They were being played, obviously. But how? Would the Set’s leader come to see them as a simple distraction?

“Tell us what the Set is planning,” Marasi said.

“No,” Telsin replied.

“Oh,” Wayne said, perking up. “Does this mean I can make her talk? On a scale of one to broken, how much do you fancy your kneecaps, Telsin?”

“I’ll heal in seconds, Wayne,” Telsin said.

“Not if we yank out the spikes,” Wayne snapped.

“Which would kill me,” Telsin said. “I’m sure that will give you *so* much information.”

“Well,” Wayne said, “breaking some pieces off you will still *hurt,* Telsin. I know a thing or two about that part.”

“Actually,” she said, “it *won’t* hurt. Did you know that a Feruchemist can store their pain in a metalmind? Oh, and you won’t be able to remove mine from me. We’ve learned better how to hide those. So torture me if you want, Wayne. I’ll find it boring, but nothing more.”

She met his gaze with confidence. Wayne glanced toward Marasi, concerned, shying away. Like a puppy whose chew toy had bitten it back.

Marasi was more worried about Wax. He’d frozen in place, gun out and pointed at Telsin, arm straight. Expression … grim. Telsin was his last close living relative, and she’d played him for a fool. Six years ago, he’d dedicated a great deal of emotional and physical effort to rescuing her from the evil forces he’d *thought* had taken her. Only to find she’d been working with them all along.

Now, she’d thrown her lot in with a god planning to destroy the world.

“Why are you here, Telsin?” Wax asked.

“To warn you, Waxillium,” Telsin said from across the room. “Your next actions will be of the utmost importance. You have two days to solve this problem. Only two precious days.”

Wax cursed softly, leaning down beside Marasi and Wayne. “Speed bubble,” he hissed.

Wayne threw one up and slowed the world around them. It would also prevent Telsin from hearing, or at least understanding, what they were saying.

“What’s she playin’ at, Wax?” Wayne said. “She should look more threatened. I shot her. Me. First time in years. And she don’t even look like she *cared*.”

“Wayne,” Marasi said, “it’s not like you gave her your virginity.”

“No it’s not!” he said. “I give *that* away all the time. This was *special*.”

Marasi glanced at Wax. “You all right?”

“I will be,” he said softly, staring at his sister—frozen in time. “It’s … painful. Like an old injury aching again. Because it never healed right.”

“Why did she say two days?” Marasi asked. “Wax, she’s trying to wrong-foot us.”

“I agree,” he said. “She’s trying to get us to believe we have more time than we do. One of her games.” He narrowed his eyes. “Her being here says something she may not realize, though. That she’s desperate. She knows she has to stop us.”

“But she’s not afraid of us,” Marasi said.

“Not physically,” Wax said. “She’s not afraid of being captured or killed by us. Harmony said … well, she’s—at least in a small way—part god. Autonomy has Invested her with some sort of power and authority, made her the avatar of Trell on this planet. For now. Until she fails.”

“Wait,” Wayne said. “*Who* is Trell and *who* is Autonomy and *who* is that on the steps?”

“That on the steps,” Wax said, “is my sister. A woman representing the god Autonomy. Using the title of Trell—an ancient god from this world.”

“Right…” Wayne said. “And all three are utter knobs?”

“Utter knobs,” Wax agreed.

Marasi followed their gaze back toward Telsin, looking so proud and confident. As she watched, Marasi could *swear* that Telsin’s eyes began to glow a soft red. The faintest of light. It was gone a moment later.

“Rusts,” she whispered. “This feels like it’s way above our pay scale, Wax.”

“There’s no one else,” he said. “But like I said, if she’s here, she’s worried about us. She wanted to go through with her plan weeks ago, but is having problems getting her technology to work. Now here we are, sniffing about, finding things they couldn’t track down. My gut says she’s here because she wants an opportunity to mess with my mind. Nudge me the wrong direction. Risky of her, but smart.”

They all fell silent, but Marasi had that same sense of cold dread from earlier. Magnified. The Set’s plan, the danger Autonomy posed … Marasi glanced down; she was still holding the picture Maraga had dug out. Ash falling from the sky, burying cities that had been destroyed.

“What do we do?” Wayne asked.

“Let me think,” Wax said. “How much bendalloy do you have? Are we wasting it?”

“Nah,” Wayne said. “I’ve got plenty.”

“He’s been saving it,” Marasi said, “and learning to be responsible with his finances and his use of metals.”

Wax glanced at him. “Who’d you take the money from?”

“Someone worthless,” Wayne said.

“Remind me to check my bank accounts,” Wax said, “if there are any banks left after all of this. For now, the most urgent matter is the bomb. They have it ready, but can’t deliver it. So we need to find whatever device they’re setting up to launch the thing, then stop it.”

“Maraga says the Set is using the bunkers under the city as a kind of base,” Marasi said. “If we can sneak in, maybe we can find the mechanism. Or at least learn its location.”

“Hard to sneak anywhere,” Wayne said, nodding toward Telsin, “with some kind of *demigod* thing watchin’ you.”

Wax thought for a moment. “I need to confront Telsin, deal with her, maybe try to get information out of her. I want to find that bomb and stop it. I might be able to sort the lies from the truth. But I do agree, trying to get into their base could be valuable. Not sure how we’d manage it though.”

Marasi glanced at Moonlight, frozen outside the speed bubble. What did she make of all this? Did she have answers?

Maybe Marasi should tell Wax. Only … would that break Moonlight's frail trust in her? The woman could easily vanish again, as she'd done after the fight at the warehouse.

So many secrets. Marasi had become a constable in part to reveal secrets—and here, in working with Moonlight, she had a chance. At something bigger. Something more important. Secrets beyond secrets. She needed more time to pry information out of Moonlight.

"Wax," she said, "we should split up."

He met her eyes. "Two teams," he said. "You find a way into the caverns. I deal with Telsin and follow any leads I get from her."

"Exactly," Marasi said. "I think Kim is trustworthy. She and I had a chance to chat when we were at the archive, and she knows a lot about the city. With her help, I might be able to locate an entrance to the caverns. In there are secrets, maybe the location of the bomb. But an infiltration like that will take time. Maybe too much time."

"So Wayne and I take a direct route," Wax said. "We interrogate Telsin and locate the bomb that way."

"She'll play with your mind, mate," Wayne said.

"I know. But she's my sister. I … I need to do this." Wax took a deep breath. "If I'm right, she'll have to give me bits of truth along with her lies. If we can play the game better than she does, it might lead us to the weapon."

"Right," Marasi said. "Whatever you find, send to Steris and Captain Reddi via radio. I'll do the same. That way, we can consolidate our information and leave notes for one another."

Wax nodded, but seemed reluctant.

"You worry local radio operators might be compromised?" Marasi said.

"It's possible," he said. "But I don't know of a better way. I'm going to send something to Steris as soon as we leave here."

"Will you write to Allik too?" she asked. "Remind him I asked him to leave the city? It's selfish of me, but…"

“It’s all right,” Wax said. “It’s not selfish to want to save those you love.” He paused. “I don’t know if we’ll have a chance to meet up again before the day is done. So if you don’t hear from me, Marasi, know that I trust your judgment. If you have a chance to stop the bomb, do so. Whatever the cost.”

“Same for you,” she said. “All right. Let’s split.” Wax nodded to Wayne, who dropped the speed bubble.

And just like that, Marasi had put herself in a position to interrogate Moonlight freely. She *would* share what she found with Wax. And he *would* understand. She felt she should have been embarrassed for keeping this from him, but in truth she was excited.

Wax walked over to Telsin. “You and I need to talk,” he said to her.

“Agreed,” she said, starting up the steps.

Wax moved to follow, pausing briefly to say something to Maraga. Before Wayne joined him, he took Marasi by the arm. “Hey,” he said softly. “Be careful with that Kim character. I think she’s fakin’ about somethin’.”

“I appreciate the warning,” Marasi said. “I think she knows more than she’s saying, but I don’t think she’s working for the enemy.”

“Right,” he said. “Hey, you take care of yourself.”

“You too, Wayne.”

“Don’t I always?”

He said it as if in jest, but there was something to his voice. “You all right?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Just feels off, you know? After six years together, I’ve gotta let you march away alone. Without my keen observations on life and the world to keep you on your toes.”

She smiled, then raised her fist for him to tap with his own. “I’m glad you walked out of the stories and into my life. I’d rather have a friend than a legend.”

“Same.”

“Wayne, no one is calling me a legend.”

“They will,” he said with a wink. “You take care. We’ll see you later tonight.” He slipped an old bowler hat off a rack near the center of the room. He put it on and left a stapler tied with a ribbon hanging in its place. Where had he found that?

Wax and Wayne disappeared up the steps behind Telsin, leaving Marasi alone with Moonlight, Maraga, and the whole cosmere's worth of secrets.

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PART THREE

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Wax nodded to Wayne, and together they dashed out of the newspaper building—Wax pulling Telsin behind him—and into the cover between two nearby apartment buildings.

Telsin sighed as they stopped, then straightened her suit jacket. “Was that necessary?”

Wax gestured, and Wayne scrambled farther along the alleyway to scout the area.

“There are no snipers,” Telsin said. “You aren’t surrounded. It’s just me.”

Wax ignored her, absently clicking the chambers on Vindication one at a time. Watching the sky, because each time he looked at her he felt pain. Betrayal. He’d told Marasi he could handle Telsin. But now he questioned that. When had he ever gotten the better of her? She’d always made a fool of him.

This is what you came here to do, he told himself. *This is why you put the coat back on. Because you know she has to be dealt with somehow.*

“What if I towed you to Elendel,” he said, “and threw you in prison. Would you just go along with it?”

“Of course not,” she said. “I came to talk. To persuade you.”

“Of what?”

She met his eyes. “To run, Wax. Return to the Roughs. Take your wife, your children, and *leave.* You have time. Step away and let me do what needs to be done. I’d rather you lived.”

“Where was that inclination six years ago?” he asked. “On that mountaintop?”

She sighed, as if at his childishness, then leaned against the wall of the alley. “I didn’t want to shoot you, Wax. I didn’t expect you to show up and undermine our plans, and I had to do what was required in the moment.

“Wax, I *know* you. I *know* you’re overwhelmed by this. It’s too big for you; it can’t be solved by barreling in, revolver in hand. Go back to a place where you can accomplish something relevant. This next part will be messy, but it’s the only way to save our planet.”

“You expect me to believe that *you* are interested in the safety of the planet? That *you* are being altruistic?”

“Hardly,” she said, her arms folded. “I live here, Wax. If the Basin goes, *I* go. If you can trust in one thing, trust in my sense of self-preservation. Elendel *has* to be destroyed. Or else.”

“Or else Autonomy destroys the entire Basin?”

“She has an army,” Telsin said, looking away. “Men of gold and red … waiting for me to fail. Breathing over my proverbial shoulder. Our best hope is for me to prove I can rule this planet for her—and I need to remove the leadership of Elendel before I can do that.” She focused on him. “We’ll be better off with her guiding us. Harmony is useless, as you’ve undoubtedly learned by now. We need someone stronger.”

“Someone who by coincidence,” he said, “wants *you* to represent her.”

“It is a job that needs to be done.”

“I’d rather it be done by practically *anyone* but you.”

“You don’t get to make that decision.” Telsin looked up toward the sky. “Once I’m fully Invested—once I’m a Sliver of Autonomy—you’ll see. I’ll rebuild the Basin. Make it as modern and efficient as Bilming. You realize that Harmony has crippled us? Life is too easy in the Basin, too lush. There’s no conflict or strife, so we don’t innovate, don’t grow. That’s what Autonomy has taught me.”

Wax, feeling cold, stepped toward her. “So the solution is to annihilate Elendel? Nearly *half* our entire population?”

She continued staring at the sky.

“Telsin,” he said, “this *insane* plan won’t work. The South will invade the moment we’re perceived as weak. The Outer Cities will rebel in *horror* at what you’ve done. I know the mayors of those cities. They’re frustrated, but they’re not monsters.

“By destroying Elendel, you’d throw us into chaos. And yes, you’ll have strife. But it will end us, as surely as if Autonomy had attacked. This won’t give you what you want. Autonomy is *playing* you. Have you considered that? Maybe she wants you to destroy the Basin so she doesn’t have to bother.”

Again, Telsin didn’t look at him. And rusts, he felt like he’d put together another piece. Harmony had talked about Autonomy and the way she pushed people to survive, to prove themselves. A destroyed city might seem like a ruthless enough move to accomplish that, which was why Telsin was pursuing it.

But what about the letter indicating the involvement of Elendel senators? he thought. *This is wrong. I’m making guesses based on incomplete information.*

“Come on,” Telsin said, turning to climb up a fire escape. “I hate the smell of alleys.”

Wax raised the gun at her and chambered a hazekiller round. An aluminum bullet with a secondary explosive that would blast after it lodged into her—a brutal shell capable of ripping off limbs. Ranette had designed it for him after he’d discovered the Bands of Mourning and had expressed interest in ways to forcibly remove spikes from bodies.

Telsin continued up the fire escape, indifferent. She paused at the first landing and glanced at Wax. “Come on.” Then she kept climbing.

Rusts. Wax raised Vindication beside his head, then dropped a bullet with the other hand and used it to launch himself up past Telsin onto the roof. She joined him a short time later, and they both looked out over the city.

“Life really would have been far simpler,” she said, “if you’d stayed in the Roughs, Wax.”

“Then you and Edwarn shouldn’t have vanished.”

“We had to go into hiding,” she said. “Did Harmony tell you what happened to our parents?”

“It was … an accident…”

“It was agents of Harmony, trying to get to *me.* Did Harmony ever admit that to you?” She strolled past him. “No, I expect not, based on your expression.”

Don’t let her play you, Wax. Get information. “I know your bomb’s delivery mechanism doesn’t work, Telsin. I *am* going to track it down and stop it. Maybe *you* should be the one planning to hide in the Roughs. Better, maybe you should be asking me for *help.* If Autonomy has an army ready to strike, then we should be figuring out how to fight it together.”

Telsin stopped at the edge of the building, elbows on the stone railing, contemplative. “It’s pretty, don’t you think? A city of the future. All symmetrical, like a perfect face. A beauty without blemish.”

“Telsin,” Wax said, stepping up to her.

“Oh, stop with the gritty constable growl, Wax,” she said. “You see this city? Six years under my direction, and it’s doing *far* better than Elendel. You have to admit we’ve been too sheltered. The Malwish are beyond us, and you haven’t even *seen* what other planets are capable of doing. We’re so far behind. We’re vulnerable.”

“I don’t see how blowing up the capital is going to change that, Telsin.”

“Because you’ve always lacked vision, Wax,” she said. “When something truly expansive lies before you, instead of comprehending it, you *run.*”

Wax kept his distance. “Why did you come to see me, Telsin?” he asked. “What is this *really* about?”

“Sibling affection?” she said. Then smiled as he gave her a flat glance in response. “I simply want you gone. Out of the equation. You interfering is bad. Even when you inevitably fail.”

Her brother showing up to ruin things is bad, he thought. Telsin glanced away again, but he sensed a tension in her posture. She was legitimately worried that her plans wouldn’t come together—that Autonomy would simply send in her armies.

Can’t have your own family ruining your masterful plans. It makes you look bad in front of the dark god deciding whether or not to destroy you.

“You can’t actually think,” he said, “that you can bully me into leaving a case.”

“I suppose not,” she said softly. “But I wanted to try.”

Yeah, she’s worried. Telsin knew him, but he knew her equally well. Perhaps Harmony was right in suggesting Wax talk to her. The sharpened sword cut cleanest, and Wax had spent a lifetime sharpening this particular blade.

“Do you remember back in the Village,” he said to her, “when you wanted your own room?”

“Father always said it was appropriate for us,” she said, “because of our lineage. We shouldn’t have to share.”

“You planted stolen cash on your own cousin to achieve it. And even *that* wasn’t your end goal—you wanted to live alone so that you could sneak out. Everything is a power play for you.”

“Because I’m willing to step up,” she said. “And take charge. Like I took over our house when our parents died. Like I’m taking over this planet. It *will* happen, Wax. I’m merely sad that I’ll have to cut through you to accomplish it.”

Wax met her gaze. And he realized something profound.

He couldn’t see anything familial in this person.

Familiar, yes. But whatever he had loved was long gone, ripped out and replaced with expansions of the parts of her he’d always hated.

“Last chance, Wax,” she said, holding his eyes. “Go back to the Roughs. With Elendel gone, those people out there are going to need someone to help guide and protect them. You can be that person. This is too big for you. You know it is.”

Wax opened his mouth to object. To explain that yes, he had run once. He’d been overwhelmed by politics, society, expectations. He’d wanted adventure, dreamed of it in the Roughs—but more, he’d wanted a place where one man could make an easy difference. Where things felt simpler.

He cut himself off, realizing something crucial. She was *wrong* about him.

He'd changed. He'd become someone new, someone who had grown beyond his fears. But she didn't realize it. She didn't know about Lessie. Didn't understand the depth of his friendship with Wayne. Didn't know of his love for Steris, the reason he'd taken Harmony's offer to return from death and try again.

She didn't know him. But she *thought she did.*

Rusts. For the first time in his life, he had an advantage over her. Telsin, by marinating in her own ambitions for years, had become an extreme version of the woman he knew. She'd continued on exactly the path he'd worried about since her youth. But he'd deviated. He'd grown. He'd *changed.*

"I might not be able to fix things in Elendel," he found himself saying. "I might not grasp everything that's happening with you and Autonomy. But stopping a bomb is something I can solve. Something I *will* solve."

She sighed, seeing only the dogged lawman. Her little brother and his fantasies.

"You have no idea…" she whispered, looking away. "You can't stop this, Wax. Even if you did find the bomb, there are redundancies upon redundancies to make sure that Autonomy gets what she wants. We need to *prove* ourselves. And I'm going to do that."

Redundancies. What did she mean by that? It didn't sound like the army Autonomy was supposedly sending. Were there other, internal pressures? Rivals? He took a guess.

"Gave Entrone," he said, "is trying to overtake you. Seize your position."

"Entrone is a coward," she said. "He won't move against me. Wax, you're not half as smart as you think you are."

He might not see it all, true—but if Entrone was a coward, then maybe Wax was interrogating the wrong person. He doubted he could break Telsin. But clearly there was someone *else* who knew these plans.

So, I get Entrone to break, he thought.

"You ever stand up someplace high," Telsin said, "and feel the irresistible urge to throw yourself off?"

"No," Wax said, frowning. "If I want to, I jump. If I don't, I don't."

“The curse of Steelpushing,” she said, staring out over the city. “You can’t feel it. The call to do something dramatic, drastic, *impressive*.”

“The urge to kill yourself on a whim?” Wax asked, baffled.

“The opportunity to be afraid,” she whispered. “To do something thrilling and new. You know, I resisted getting the spikes for Steelpushing and Ironpulling? I didn’t want to lose my nervousness around heights. Then I found new fears, new challenges, new *ambitions*.”

Wax nodded slowly. That was his Telsin. The woman who always pushed recklessly for more. More power. But also more experiences. More novelty. More control over others.

“There’s an entire cosmere out there,” she said to him. “Few ever see or know it. But I have a chance to. A real chance. I’m not going to let you take that from me. I’m telling you, Wax, I’m not going to pull my punches. I’ll do *whatever it takes*.”

“And I’ll stop you. Whatever it takes.”

“Ever the moralist,” she said, glancing at him. “Standing so tall, pretending you see so high, when in reality you can barely *grasp* the problems you’re trying to fix. I’ve already solved them. Do you want to hear of Trell? Autonomy? What it means to be her avatar?”

A part of him did. But if she wanted to tell him about it … if she was offering …

Rusts, then she was stalling.

She was desperate, trying to buy as much time as she could. That piece clicked into place. She was talking to him because she had to keep him distracted. The trick wasn’t to realize that she was stalling, it was to recognize that as long as he let her tease him with information, she held all the cards.

There was only one way to win this particular game. And that was to leave the table.

“She’s going to destroy us?” he said, strolling across the top of the roof behind her.

“Unless I prove to her that we’re worth saving,” she explained, turning to survey the city. As before, she didn’t seem to care that she had her back to him. “Autonomy is … odd. She respects those who are bold, strong, able to survive on their own. But she also wants them to obey her. I suppose that is the irony of godhood. Half the time, being ‘autonomous’ means following her plan. And there’s no Whimsy to her—that’s a different god.

“Autonomy is rugged individualism filtered through the lens of a god who thinks she knows best. And in that context, individualism is a virtue best applied to finding ways to carry out the plans *she* has outlined. You get to be individual in your chosen path to do what *she* says…”

Wax missed the next part, as he had quietly slipped over the side of the roof. With luck, she’d keep right on talking, giving him time to get away.

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Marasi and Moonlight hurriedly finished up in the basement—Moonlight grabbing a last few rubbings of the wall plates and tucking them away in her case. Together they then climbed to the main floor, where they found the grey-haired editor Maraga standing in the center of a cluttered room, holding an overstuffed travel bag and looking frazzled.

“On his way out,” she said to Marasi, “Dawnshot told me to go to family in the countryside. But all of my family is either here or in Elendel. Should I … go to them?”

“Probably not wise,” Marasi said. Any family in Bilming would be easily tracked down by the Set, and Elendel … well, it had a massive bomb pointed at it.

That thought filled Marasi with worry. But she needed to focus on preventing the disaster. She had to leave helping Elendel to her sister.

“Moonlight,” Marasi said, “surely there’s a place in the city you could send Maraga? A place of safety for someone who did us such great service?”

Moonlight considered for a moment. She wasn’t the type to rush into things, it seemed. Careful. Calculating. Finally she slipped a small card from her sleeve, marked with the interlocking diamond symbol. “Do you know the Knightbridge district?”

“Yes,” Maraga said, hesitantly taking the card.

“Go to Thirty-Third and Finete, house number one eighty-seven. Knock, show them this, and tell them Moonlight said you could ask for asylum as recompense for services rendered. They’ll take you in. Even the Set will have trouble assaulting that place.”

“Thank you,” the woman said, clutching the card to her chest.

“I’ll send someone to collect your research,” Moonlight said. “Though I have the plates all copied. You need to go. Quickly.”

“I’m going to fetch my sister too,” Maraga said. “Please?”

“If you must,” Moonlight said. “But be warned, since the Set knows we’re here, each moment you waste endangers your life.”

Maraga rushed to the door. She paused to look over what she was leaving, then steeled herself and hurried out.

“What about us?” Moonlight asked.

“We need to determine a likely entry point to the underground caverns,” Marasi said. “Do you have maps of enemy movements? Lists of places you think might be owned by the Set?”

“Not on me,” Moonlight said. “Perhaps we could return to the records office and do some research.”

“I think I have a better idea,” Marasi said, leading the way out the front door. “Riskier, but hopefully faster.”

“I’m intrigued,” Moonlight said, joining her as they walked to a busier street where—with some effort—Marasi managed to flag down a cab. She found it amazing how quickly coachmen had made the swap between horse-drawn carriages and motorcabs.

They settled in the rear of the motorcar, and the cabbie—a woman with dark hair in a ponytail—glanced back at them. “Where to?”

“Knightbridge district,” Marasi said. “Thirty-Third and Finete.”

The cabbie nodded, pulling out into the flow of traffic and taking them westward.

“Clever,” Moonlight said to Marasi. “I’m going to have to watch myself around you. But what makes you think our safehouse will have the maps you want?”

“You found me in the caverns beneath Elendel,” Marasi said. “Plus, a moment ago you implied such maps existed—you didn’t have them ‘on you.’ Ergo, I assumed this was a good path forward. Your people will have the information we need.”

“They might not let you in,” Moonlight said. “What then? You’ll have wasted time.”

“Wasted time,” Marasi snapped. “Wasted *time*?” She glanced toward the cabbie, uncertain what she should say.

“Darkwater, dear,” Moonlight said to the cabbie, “give us a little privacy.”

“Sure thing, Moonlight,” the cabbie said, shutting the window separating the front of the car from the back.

Marasi gaped. Then she looked at Moonlight, who shrugged.

“Moonlight,” Marasi said, focusing her thoughts, “what kind of game do you think we’re playing? Didn’t you say your entire purpose was protecting this planet? Now you imply you’d keep me locked out of your safehouse, and the vital information it contains?”

Moonlight settled in her seat, thoughtful. “My organization,” she eventually said, “was created to protect and advance the needs of the planet Scadrial. It’s not my homeland, but I am committed to seeing it remain stable. There are terrible forces moving in the cosmere; my people are going to need allies.”

“So why are you so resistant to helping me?”

“To be honest,” Moonlight said, “I’m worried we’re being played. Autonomy is adept at misdirection, at false leads and confusing shadows of half-truths. Restarting the ashfalls? That seems … outrageous. Impossible even for her. Something is off about all this. A shade too red to be natural.”

“So help me find the truth, Moonlight,” Marasi said. “Stop toying with me.”

“I’m not toying with you,” Moonlight said. “This is an audition.”

Marasi blinked. *What?*

“Until a little while ago,” Moonlight continued, “I assumed we had months to unravel the Set’s plan.” She tapped her armrest with a fingernail, then looked at her bag, where the rubbings she’d taken were peeking out.

During their short time working together, Marasi had started to see Moonlight as all-knowing—someone mysterious, alien. But that concern in her eyes, the way she was fighting uncertainty … that was all too human.

“I’ll let you into the safehouse,” Moonlight finally said. “And deal with the ramifications later, if this proves to all be another of Autonomy’s shadow games. But I’m not sure I can give you everything you want.

“We don’t have the caverns in the city mapped, but we do watch their agents.” She patted her bag, and the rubbings. “This lists coordinates of the explosions. So if we compare where the blasts have been happening with the places where Set agents appear and vanish…”

“… We might be able to find a way into their testing facility,” Marasi said. “I did something similar to locate that cavern under Elendel.”

“I remember when all this started to hit me,” Moonlight said softly. “When my world expanded, and my personal squabbles—even the ones that influenced the fates of empires—suddenly became so small. You’re doing remarkably well.”

“My life,” Marasi said, “has mostly been expanses of quiet humdrum punctuated by sudden explosions—usually literal ones—of activity. I’m used to working under pressure.”

“And dealing with gods?” Moonlight said. “Fighting their influence?”

“Well, we have one on our own side, after all.”

“Kind of,” Moonlight said. “Harmony isn’t terribly reliable these days. At least not in the ways my mentor would prefer. It’s less like having a god on your side—and more like having a powerful referee who only sometimes pays attention to your fight.”

“Or an observer,” Marasi said, “who you’re sure could do more to help, but doesn’t for some baffling reason.”

“Yes, like…” Moonlight narrowed her eyes. “Point made. Here, we’re approaching the safehouse. Hopefully the Survivor hasn’t returned unexpectedly. My mentor isn’t always reasonable when it comes to people he sees as Harmony’s agents, and might respond … poorly.”

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Wayne had read a real interesting book once about a fellow what went back in time. It had happened because he'd turned on too many electric switches at once. That was ridiculous, but the book had been written when electricity had been new—so it was forgivable. People had thought some funny stuff about electricity back then. Wayne himself had tried to fill a bucket with it once.

He found himself thinking of that story as he scoured the nearby alleys for signs of the Set's agents. See, the book had been all about how changing the past was this dangerous thing. The fellow in it had broken some branches off a tree, and when he'd returned to the future, his father had liked eating butter on his sandwiches instead of mayo. Also, sapient lions had ruled the city.

Wayne had thought there was something … off about the story. When he'd mentioned it to friends, Nod had told him of another one with the same idea, where a fellow was sent back in time through the intricacies of indoor plumbing and an unfortunately large flush. And *he* had changed things by eating a bagel, then returned to discover that everybody spoke backward and no one wore shirts anymore.

This book had been better than the first one on account of it having more cussing—plus the no-shirts part being universally applied and *very* descriptively relayed—but still, Wayne found the idea uncomfortable.

He traded a beggar—unbeknownst to the fellow—a stack of cash for a dirty handkerchief; Wayne liked it on account of it havin' a little bunny sewn in the corner. He was starting to figure out why those stories bothered him. They had this sense that changing the future was frightening and dangerous.

But didn't people change it every day?

Wayne wondered regarding the choices people made. Rushing through their lives eating bagels, breaking twigs. Each of them changing the future. Shouldn't they all … worry about that a little more? Worry how they were changing the future right now, rather than writing books about people doing it in the past? Even if they couldn't know some things, there was a lot they could anticipate. They might not make that future have talking lions or whatnot—but they might make it have angrier, sadder people.

Maybe stories about fellows quietly making the world better were just too dull. Sounded boring, actually. Maybe if the people in them wore no shirts …

A hand wrapped around Wayne's mouth from behind. He almost killed the fellow—but it smelled like Wax, so …

Yup, it was Wax. The man eased Wayne back into an alleyway, then pulled him down beside some rubbish as someone passed on the street. Telsin, searching around, annoyed.

After she was gone, Wax removed his hand.

"You let her go?" Wayne whispered.

"Call me crazy—"

"You're crazy."

"—but it feels more like I escaped." Wax nodded his head in the other direction and they snuck away.

"I have to say," Wayne muttered, "that there are better methods of gettin' my attention. You're not supposed to take friends captive, Wax, unless it involves a safeword and stretchy ropes."

"Stretchy ropes?"

"More fun if you can move a little," Wayne said. "I got to test them, since I had to be the one getting tied up. You know, on account of the fact that my girlfriend could turn into a puddle of jelly on command. Kind of undermines the point of bondage."

Wax groaned softly as they slipped out onto the street. “I did *not* need to know any of that, Wayne. Could you maybe avoid being crass on the missions Harmony specifically sent us on?”

“Hey now,” Wayne said. “That’s not crass. MeLaan is a divine being. Chosen by Harmony. I figure, dating her was basically like going to church, you know?”

“And the stretchy ropes?”

“A, uh, metaphor for us all being bound by God’s will?”

They shared a look, then Wax actually grinned as he shook his head. Good. Guy was too uptight these days, what with parenthood, bein’ a senator, and having to save the whole damn city now and then.

Hoid pulled up in the car to get them, per Wayne’s earlier request—but Telsin was still lurking around. So Wax and Wayne slipped out another way and entered a busy street of bustling people. Full of Bilming idiots what had no idea how difficult they was making life. Though he supposed that was too much of a generalization. There were plenty of people in Bilming that weren’t idiots—they came from out of town to gawk at all the idiots.

“Did you get a lead out of Telsin?” Wayne asked as they blended into the crowd.

“Maybe,” Wax said.

“Well, I’ve *definitely* got a lead.”

“You do? Thank Harmony.”

“Yup. There’s a *shining* good pub three streets over. Two different bums swore by it.”

Wayne earned a real good glare out of that one. Made him feel all proud of himself. Smiles, then glares, then smiles, then glares. They pulled at a person like taffy, keeping them limber.

“I had to get away from Telsin,” Wax said. “I’m sure she was stalling, trying to keep me occupied.”

“Seems like she’s worried we can stop her.”

“Agreed. Which is encouraging. But I won’t get anything useful from her. Not in time. We need someone else to interrogate, and she gave me a lead: I think the lord mayor deserves a visit.”

“Here now,” Wayne said. “Now *that’s* an idea.”

They stopped on the street, people giving them a wide berth. The folks here seemed to dress with a lot more variety than in Elendel, but nobody wore guns. Wax stood out like a big ol' wart on a fellow's face. The type that you really wanted to pop to see what oozed out.

"We don't exactly blend in, do we?" Wax said.

"Mate, you're wearing a rusting *mistcoat.*"

"They're comfy."

"They draw attention."

"You like attention!"

"Depends on who's looking." He eyed Wax. "Never have figured out how to go up stairs in one of those things without tripping over my own feet."

"I've never had any trouble."

Figured. Mistcoats appeared like a regular piece of clothing, but Wayne was sure they was secretly something else. Made of mist or such—and since Harmony *liked* Wax, the coat didn't trip him.

Wasn't fair that God liked Wax better. Wayne didn't *mean* to blaspheme when he got drunk, it just slipped out. And really, if the blasphemy leaked out, didn't that mean he was more pious afterward? That was why he got drunk so often. That, and absolutely no other reason.

The two of them moved to the side of the street, in the mouth of an alleyway, to plan. Wax glared right smartly at anyone who gawked, sending them on their way.

"So," Wax said, "we should choose our next course soon. Because if I somehow actually managed to lose the Set when slipping away from Telsin, they'll surely spot us before too long."

"'Cuz you stand out like pink shoes on a pallbearer."

"'Cuz I stand out like pink shoes on a pallbearer."

"I like the idea of shakin' down Entrone," Wayne said. "On principle, at least. But I worry about how much attention that would draw. So maybe we don't need to interrogate him specifically. After all, we do know where he lives."

Wayne pointed across the city, up the road, to the silvery-white building sitting at the end. It wasn't the highest building in town. The central spire, dominating the very middle of the city, was the highest by a lot. And they were even adding to it at the top, it seemed, with new construction.

Still, there was a certain majesty about the mayor’s mansion. The kind that said, “Oi, mate! Don’t use words like ‘oi, mate’ ’round here.”

“Entrone,” Wayne said, “is obviously involved in all this. He’s the type to have secrets written down somewhere, maybe give us a lead on where that bomb is being kept. He’s probably got a safe or something full of answers.”

“You just said shaking him down would create another incident,” Wax said, his hands on his hips, holstered guns jutting out and making basically everybody nearby nervous. “Now you’re suggesting we ransack his *mansion*?”

“I’m suggesting,” Wayne said, giving it a nice upper-class, Fifth Octant, old-money accent, “that once we have completed our radio communication, we give the esteemed lord mayor an evening turn-down service with mints on his pillow, folded towels in the shape of a monkey, and a light despoiling of his intimate affairs. Done with *only* the most *delicate* attention, mind you. A *courteous* looting. An … upper-class plundering.”

“Is that so?” Wax said.

Wayne leaned in. “I mean, we’ll still break all his stuff and steal his secrets. I just won’t fart on his chair before we go. You know. To keep things classy.”

Wax took a deep breath. “Well, I suppose that does walk the line between accosting the man himself and doing something that has a good chance of success. Let’s do it.”

Wayne grinned.

“But *I’ll* do the ransacking,” Wax said. “*You* handle the distraction.”

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Steris threw open the door to the governor’s chamber, where he was holding his private council on what to do about Bilming. Then held that door open for Constable-General Reddi. He’d been invited to the meeting along with his staff. Today that included two other people: Constable Gorglen as record keeper. And Steris.

The governor sat at the head of the meeting table. Adawathwyn immediately glared at Steris through dark brown eyes. The three senators—Lord Cett, Lady Hammondess, and Lady Gardre—were in attendance, as well as Ambassador Daal, his expression unreadable behind his bloodred mask. The shorter man hadn’t taken a seat at the table, but instead stood by the wall, his posture prim and sharp.

“Ah, finally,” the governor said, looking up from the broadsheets. “Reddi. You … Wait. What is *she* doing here?”

“Lady Ladrian?” Reddi said. “Subject matter expert, on my payroll.”

As of fifteen minutes ago, at least. Steris had insisted he actually pay her, and she clutched the single coin in her fist as she shut the door behind Reddi. Then she stepped forward and sat down at the table beside him.

“Did she tell you,” the governor said, “that I specifically excluded her from this council?”

“Yes, she did,” Reddi replied. “And frankly, Your Grace, I thought that an unwise move. She’s the wife of the man who alerted us to this crisis. When Lady Ladrian approached me and explained why I should employ her, I realized she’d undoubtedly have information this council needs.”

The vice governor folded her arms on the table, scowling. But the governor … he nodded. Steris always hesitated to read too much into people's expressions, but now she wondered. Was there a rift between these two? She'd always assumed Varlance was entirely in Adawathwyn's pocket.

But then, no person ever fit comfortably in a pocket.

"Very well," the governor said. "I'm afraid we started without you. As the information has come in and we've gauged the feelings of Outer Cities governments, we've come to see that our path is inevitable. It looks like war."

"War?" Reddi said.

"It's the necessary course of action," Lady Hammondess said. She had a small gap between her front teeth, of the sort men often described as cute—as if it were the reason for her beauty rather than her flawless skin, delicate features, and long lashes. Curious, how minor flaws became cute when their bearer also happened to be conventionally attractive. "The Outer Cities are building up for war."

"Warships in Bilming," Lord Cett agreed. He was a striking man, if you liked the smooth and well-dressed sort. Steris wondered how much work it took to keep one's rough edges so contained behind powders and soft clothing. "Railroad blockades to the south. Recruitment flyers in the Roughs, offering jobs for 'security forces.'"

"Which is why," Constable Reddi said, "we need to work so hard to soothe the situation and reconcile!"

"Better," Lady Hammondess said, "we should strike first. We've been ignoring the warning signs for too long. If we don't move soon, we will *not* be able to win."

Steris glanced at Lady Gardre, the third of the nobles in the room. The plump woman was much less of a war hawk than the others, far more reasonable. But even she nodded, reluctantly. And it *did* make sense. Every day that Elendel dithered gave the other cities time to build power. Elendel had the advantage of infrastructure, manufacturing, and coordination. But that wouldn't remain an edge for long.

Striking first made sense if you thought war was inevitable. But it wasn't. It didn't *have* to be.

This was the enemy's plan. She was increasingly certain that saber-rattling in the Outer Cities was a cover for whatever weapon was being prepared in Bilming.

Reddi began sputtering. "War with what army? Elendel has barely ten thousand troops, and that's *counting* our navy protecting shipping to the South!"

"We have conscription plans in place," Adawathwyn said smoothly. "And we have a very capably trained constabulary."

Reddi seemed horrified by that statement. Steris had something to add, but she hesitated. Was this the part where she spoke? She could rarely figure that out.

"My people," Reddi said, "are *not* soldiers."

"Pardon, constable," Lord Cett said, leaning across the table. "But no one is a soldier until they're trained to be."

"We're needed," Reddi explained. "Law—"

"We'll be under *martial* law," the governor explained. "Policing crime in the city will get a lot easier with curfews. You can put excess constables into the military force."

Maybe *this* was the part where she should speak. Steris opened her mouth and made a noise to that effect, but they kept talking straight over her.

"I won't stand for this!" Reddi said, throwing himself—paradoxically—to his feet. "This is not the oath my constables swore!"

"You don't get to choose, constable," the governor said. "I hold your commission, and that of every constable in this city. They ultimately answer to me."

"We can quit, Varlance," Reddi said, leaning forward, his hands on the table. "You can't *force* us to fight."

"I—" Steris started.

"Actually," Adawathwyn said lightly, "that's precisely what a draft *is*, Constable Reddi."

"I would—" Steris tried again.

"Yeah?" Reddi snapped. "And who exactly is going to lock us up?"

"Everyone shut up and listen!" Steris snapped. "Or I will barf on the table to get your attention!"

The entire room stared at her.

"I'll do it," she warned. "I keep medication in my handbag to produce the effect. You'd be surprised at how often the option is relevant."

Well, now she had their attention.

"If we are worried about war," she said, "we should immediately begin an evacuation of the city."

"No good," Cett said. "If there is war, we need workers to facilitate industry—and to ramp up production of munitions."

Rusts. That was the correct answer. She'd hoped he wouldn't have thought that far forward. She glanced at the silent Malwish ambassador. What did he think of all of this? Had he anticipated it? She had always kept her focus on members of the Set in the Basin. But who was to say there weren't members among the Malwish as well? Rusts.

"War is not the answer," she said, turning back to the group. "It serves our enemies, not us. Look, I made a list here, to prove the logic of what I say. I'm increasingly convinced that the leaders of the Outer Cities *want* us to be passing legislation that restricts and insults them. They *want* us interfering.

"They have built gunships and militaries, but they *have not* attacked. They caught Waxillium in their midst, shooting up a warehouse, but what haven't they done? They haven't expelled our constables or officials from the city. They've shouted about it, they've drawn up editorials. But they haven't *attacked*. Why not?"

"Because they need *us* to do it," Reddi said. "They need us to give them a reason to go to war."

"The common people of the Basin don't want to fight," Steris said. "Certainly not against Elendel—where they undoubtedly have family."

"Or because they don't think they can win," Lord Cett said.

Steris looked down at her notes. "That's … unfortunately a real possibility."

"Why is that unfortunate?" Reddi asked.

"Because," Steris said, "if they know they can't defeat us in open war they might do something desperate. Like unleash a weapon of cataclysmic relevance."

"Returning to your real point," Adawathwyn said. "This bomb you keep harping on."

But Governor Varlance was watching her. He was listening.

"My husband," Steris said, "is in Bilming investigating it as we speak. He produced a terribly dangerous explosion in our laboratory, using rare materials we know the enemy has. We have traced a set of test explosions in caverns underneath Bilming. Something *is* happening."

She met the governor's eyes. "And if our fears about a bomb are true," she said softly, "then the posturing—manipulating us into the position of a bully and tyrant who needs to be resisted—might be intended to give the leaders of the Outer Cities a justification. A way to explain why they had to take such extreme measures. Like destroying us all."

The room quieted, but then Lady Gardre shook her head. "Are we really entertaining these fancies? Doomsday weapons? The real politics of the situation aren't enough?"

She, Steris realized, looking at the quiet woman, *must be the member of the Set.* She'd assumed there would be at least one moving among the political elite of Elendel. For a while she'd worried it was the governor or Adawathwyn, but they were both too obvious. The Set liked to move beneath layers of obscurity.

The governor was far too prominent, and Adawathwyn too actively working for things the Set wanted. She was a decoy; she likely assumed she was the mastermind of her own designs. In actuality, she was just another puppet. Encouraged, but left clean so that her eventual downfall wouldn't lead to real conspirators. Who included, smartly, the woman who was seen as the most reasonable. The most rational.

Steris felt far more comfortable upon identifying her. It was like … finding a snake in your intimates drawer. Yes, it was alarming. But at least you could close the drawer and know where it was.

But how to steer the conversation in defiance of that woman? Ah. Perhaps that?

She turned to the constables. “This might be the right time to reveal yourself,” she said.

“Huh?” Reddi asked.

“Not you, Constable-General,” she said, looking past him toward the lanky Constable Gorglen—the younger man with a long neck and freckles. So unassuming. He met her eyes.

“How did you know?” he asked in a grinding, rough voice that didn’t match his frame.

“Process of elimination,” she said. “We were promised help, and MeLaan said there were multiple kandra among the constables, but gave only one name. Plus, you walk awkwardly when you have to use a two-legged body.”

“Damn,” Gorglen—TenSoon—said. “But I suppose you’re right about the timing.” He stood up before the room of surprised people and made his skin transparent. “Harmony would like me to impress upon you the importance of our current debate—and to confirm what Lady Ladrian is saying. The Set is real. They are planning to annihilate Elendel.”

The governor gasped.

Adawathwyn drew back.

Reddi gaped, then spun on Steris. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wasn’t a hundred percent certain until earlier today,” Steris admitted. “I actually wondered if *you* were also kandra, Reddi. I decided against it, as I don’t think Harmony likes his kandra impersonating important officials. Except that once. Well, and that other time. But those were exceptions.” She flipped open one of her notebooks. “I’ve been tracking who might have been replaced for weeks now. See? Kandra attendant to the constable-general. Second most likely placement in the city for one of the Immortals.”

“And the first?” Adawathwyn asked.

“You,” Steris said, flipping back a page. “But I was working with outdated information. A kandra in your place would take far more care not to be an utterly worthless piece of slime.” She made a notation. The room was quiet. “Oh, did I say something awkward again? I *do* make that mistake sometimes, don’t I?”

Reddi slumped back into his seat. “I can’t believe this…”

“It was all but inevitable that they would be among your staff, Constable-General Reddi,” Steris said.

“No,” he said. “It’s not that he’s kandra. It’s that … rusts, Wayne was right…”

“I am TenSoon,” the kandra said to the room, eliciting another series of gasps. He growled softly. “I hate it when people do that. Harmony is worried. And so *you* should be worried. Especially as Harmony is … unable to see certain things lately. We are working blind.”

“What can blind a god?” the governor asked.

“Another god,” Steris mumbled.

“So what do we do?” Reddi asked. “We can’t go to war, not if that’s what they want. But—”

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. There were no attendants in the room, just senators and the like, so Reddi answered it himself: revealing a young woman, a radio technician by her uniform, holding a folded piece of paper.

“What is it?” Reddi demanded.

“Communication from Dawnshot,” she said, “for Lady Ladrian. I … um … thought it was worth interrupting you, even though the people outside said—”

“You did the right thing,” Reddi said, taking it.

The poor woman was pale and trembling.

“You read it?” Steris asked.

“I had to transcribe it for you,” she said. “That’s how it works…”

Reddi handed Steris the letter, and she unfolded it. The opening words, bold and dominant, leaped off the page.

> *Bomb is confirmed real, and already fabricated. City-destroying capacity. Enemy is trying to find a way to deliver it to Elendel. It’s time to evacuate the city.*

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Marasi stood before an unassuming townhome, one in a long row of structures along the street, each a different color with a slightly different building shape. Each lawn held a different variety of tree. Bilming ideal: mass-produced individuality.

Marasi hesitated on the threshold. Ruin. Was she ready to meet the Survivor himself? A man she had been taught since childhood to worship, a man who had transcended even the grave. Who had briefly held the mantle of Preservation before releasing it to the Ascendant Warrior. And who had then protected the people of the Southern Continent for years after the world was remade.

Moonlight was confident that her mentor really was him. So how would it feel to meet him?

You've chatted with Death, Marasi thought. *Is this so different?*

Judging by her nerves: Yes. Yes it was.

Moonlight touched her finger to a piece of metal on the door, and the thing unlocked. "Identity lock," she noted, then pushed open the door. The small foyer inside was all hardwood and polish, and there were no paintings or other ornamentations of note. Moonlight headed to the left, into a large room with thick drapes covering the windows.

The walls were lined with maps, illuminated by electric lights. Moonlight slid her bag onto a table by the far wall, where a woman in her twenties—somewhat plump, with a stark blonde bob—was peering at a paper covered in strange writing. She had a small terrier in her lap.

“Moonlight,” the woman said after a glance. “You have to read this. Travel to Bjendal has been completely upset. That’s *four* primary systems we can’t visit without extreme danger, if you count Roshar. I’ve said it for years: The perpendicularities are no longer viable. They never *were* good for mass transportation or commerce, no matter how hard those fools on Nalthis try. We need a different…” The woman trailed off, then turned in her seat, perhaps hearing Marasi stepping into the room. “Hey! You brought a local!”

“Marasi, meet Codenames,” Moonlight said. “Codenames, meet Marasi. We’re working on a mission together.”

“Wow,” Codenames said, thrusting the sheet of paper at Moonlight, then hopping to her feet, the small dog under her arm. “You must trust her.”

“Hardly.”

“You brought her to the safehouse!”

“She forced me.”

“No one forces you to do anything,” Codenames said, then bounced over and thrust her free hand toward Marasi. “Hi! I’m Codenames Are Stupid. Long story.”

The woman had a faint accent, wholly unlike that of Allik or anyone Marasi had met from the Southern Continent. That, plus the way she’d spoken of “locals,” indicated … another traveler? The presence of an accent indicated she might not be as good at languages as Moonlight was, maybe?

Marasi shook her hand. “Is … um … the Survivor here?”

“Kell?” Codenames said. “Nah. Haven’t seen him in a week or so.” She spun toward Moonlight. “What do you think of the report? Worrisome, right?”

Moonlight held the paper pinched between two fingers. “Codenames,” she said, “what language is this even in?”

“Thaylen,” Codenames said. “Oh! It’s a *fascinating* one, Moonlight. You should learn it! Look how the letters interlock in—”

“I’ll stick to using Connection tricks for languages, thank you,” Moonlight said, spreading out the rubbings she’d taken.

“That’s cheating.”

“Another word for a clever shortcut,” Moonlight said. “Is TwinSoul here? I think we’re going to need some mathematics.”

“Lily and I will go and grab him,” Codenames said, carrying her dog and slipping away into the back rooms.

Marasi had watched the exchange with bafflement, but rather than focus on what she didn’t understand, she turned her attention to something she did. One of the maps was of Scadrial—the entire world. A more detailed map than she’d ever seen, far more extensive than the official surveys—it even included the dark parts of the unexplored islands and landmasses to the south.

If that was Scadrial, then what were these other maps? Rusts. How many worlds were out there?

There’s always another secret, she thought, remembering her catechism as a child studying the life of the Survivor.

A short time later, Codenames walked back into the room with an elderly man. He looked … well, ancient, judging by the long powder-white mustache and the liver-spotted skin, which was a deep tan. He wore a formal suit in the Bilming fashion, so … maybe he was from her land? But he also had a short beard with mustaches—a style she’d never seen a man wear in Elendel. Though he stood tall, not the least bit bowed by age, he did seem a little unsteady on his feet—since he gripped the doorframe as he stepped through it.

“Ah,” he said, pressing his palms together. “A guest! Welcome to our home, honored guest. Let me get you something to drink.”

“TwinSoul,” Moonlight said, “we are on a deadline to—”

“Deadlines are no excuse for rudeness,” TwinSoul said. “I am TwinSoul, and you are…?”

“Marasi,” she said.

“Lady Marasi!” he said. “Excellent.” He immediately turned toward what Marasi assumed was the kitchen. “How do you take your tea?”

“Um … mint tea, if you have it. With lemon?”

“Excellent!” he said again. He soon returned with a plate bearing a cup and an array of nuts and fruits. “Please enjoy.”

She felt guilty making someone so old wait on her—but at the same time there was a certain forcefulness to how he offered the refreshment. It reminded her of her aunt, who would be far more offended if you didn't accept a drink. So Marasi took the cup and a handful of nuts.

"Now," TwinSoul said. "What have you brought me, Moonlight? Curious, curious." He stepped over to the table and surveyed the rubbings—stretching out his hands and resting them on the table.

Marasi stepped up, curious. There was something odd about his hands that she hadn't noticed earlier: a line of crystal. Embedded in the skin, running along the outsides of his fingers and wrists—almost like a seam on a glove. It was pinkish-red, like rose quartz. The man leaned down, and she saw lines of similar crystal appear from beneath his collar, growing up the sides of his neck and temples. Crossing his skin like little rivers of liquid.

As she watched with amazement, these tendrils expanded from his temples, forming *spectacles.* Completely made of crystal, the lens parts more transparent than the rest. A *second* set of lenses, smaller, formed in front of the others—giving him extra magnification.

"How…" Marasi said, glancing at Moonlight. "How does he do that?"

"I fear," TwinSoul said, pulling tight one of the rubbings, "that such information is not lightly shared with an outsider, even an honored guest. I must trust that Moonlight thinks this is acceptable for you to see, but I apologize. I will not explain without leave from our leader."

"It's an emergency," Moonlight said, lounging against a bookshelf with her arms folded. "I had to risk bringing her in." She glanced at Marasi, and seemed to be hiding a smile at Marasi's visible wonder.

She's not as worried about my visit as she implied, Marasi thought. *She sees this as an opportunity to intrigue me.*

It was working. TwinSoul arranged the various rubbings, then raised an index finger. Two lines of crystal grew up the outsides of that finger and formed into a *nib,* like a fountain pen. He absently unscrewed a small jar of ink, then began taking notes.

"What is the emergency, Moonlight?" he asked.

"Autonomy is moving on a much faster timetable than we believed," she explained. "One of these charts lists explosions—once assumed to be due to railway construction. We’re hoping you could correlate that with the hotspots of enemy activity we’ve been monitoring, to find a likely entry point to the caverns.”

“Ah yes,” TwinSoul said. “Silajana says he would be happy to aid in this. Kaise, would you fetch the appropriate binder?”

“Sure thing,” Codenames said, bounding off to do as she was asked. With Marasi’s help, Moonlight pulled over a long table and arranged some of the rubbings on it. They left the circular table at the center of the room empty for now, though Marasi couldn’t guess why.

As TwinSoul took notes, he absently created a cup from the same rose-colored stone, then filled it from a water jug at the side of the room. When he was finished drinking, he set the cup on a plate—and the stone disintegrated into fine powder, which then eventually vanished. A short time later, he made a thin knife blade on one finger and cut out a specific section of the rubbing.

When Codenames returned a short time later, TwinSoul was settled at the table—on a crystal chair he had created. Marasi fidgeted and checked the wall clock. They’d spent almost half an hour here so far. She didn’t know how tight their deadline was, but given what they’d discovered, waiting was unnerving.

“Hmmm…” TwinSoul said, scribbling some more notes with his finger pen. As he wrote, a line of crystal grew off his other hand and reached the cut-out section of the rubbing. There it formed a little frame around the flimsy square of paper. A pole grew up behind it, hanging it like a picture for better inspection.

TwinSoul peered at it through his improvised spectacles, playing with his long mustaches.

“I wish my brother were here,” Codenames said from a seat nearby. “He’d do this math easily…” She looked forlorn as she said it.

“The problem is not merely one of mathematics,” TwinSoul said. He stood and walked away from the little workstation, leaving the framed piece of paper behind—and this time the stone didn’t disintegrate. He filled himself a much larger cup of water, then stepped up to the circular table and rested one hand on it while drinking.

A crystal city grew up from the table.

It started at his hand, then spread out—like frost forming on steel. His crystal reminded Marasi of a darker version of the pink saltstone Steris had once purchased for decorating the kitchen. Buildings sprouted from it, streets formed as troughs—in minutes a complete replica of the city adorned the table, the circular elevated train tracks of the partially finished high-speed rail growing in last of all.

Marasi's breath caught, then she looked at the old man, who was smiling in a self-satisfied way. He appeared to enjoy the showmanship. Perhaps if she hadn't been here, he'd have pulled out a mundane map. But this was oh so much more impressive.

"It's called an aether," Moonlight said, walking up behind her. "An ancient entity predating the creation of your world. TwinSoul can grow it, manipulate it. Would you like to know more?"

"Yes," Marasi whispered.

Moonlight smiled. "And you shall. Once you join us."

Marasi breathed out softly, then reached out to touch the tip of one of the buildings—which felt solid beneath her fingers, more sturdy than she'd expected. The aether was mostly smooth, with tiny pits here and there.

"I have three likely options for you," TwinSoul said. "I've marked them in deeper-colored roseite."

He pointed toward one building, a little pointer stick—the kind professors used for gesturing at chalkboards—growing between his fingers. The building indicated was indeed a deeper red. It was the central spire of the city, right at the heart of Bilming, rising high above the surrounding structures. Straight along the sides, then tapering sharply toward the unfinished upper floors.

"Independence Tower," TwinSoul said. "This is no surprise—we've known that the agents of Autonomy have been using this as their base for years."

"And there were explosions underneath?" Marasi asked.

"The detonations happened farther to the east," TwinSoul said. "But I doubt that the entrance to those caverns will be right in the center of the detonations, for obvious reasons. Independence Tower is a central hub of activity for our esteemed antagonists, and I'd bet it has an entrance to the caverns."

"But it will be heavily guarded," Marasi said. "What are the other two options?"

"This office building here, my lady," he said, pointing to a smaller structure in the city grid.

She nodded. "Note, though, I'm not a lady. I work for a living."

"It is merely a distinction of respect, Lady Marasi," he said. "From among my people. It … translates oddly into your language. Regardless, this office building—the Dulouis Building—is both a hotbed of Set activity *and* at the perimeter of one of the locations with tremors. I consider it the most likely option."

He pointed back at the tall structure. "As you noted, Independence Tower is highly defended—a veritable fortification, a castle in the middle of the city. Breaching it has proven beyond even the arts of the Survivor himself."

"Not for lack of trying," Codenames added. "Their security system can spot ghosts. He hasn't figured out a way to circumvent that."

"And the final location?" Marasi asked.

"It seems of less import," TwinSoul said, pointing at a structure on the perimeter of the city, beneath a section of train track. "An old tire factory."

"Tires?" Moonlight said, stepping up beside Marasi. "Like where Tobal Copper worked?"

"TwinSoul, would I be correct to assume that factory is owned by Basin Tires?" Marasi asked.

"Indeed," TwinSoul said. "You appear to have information beyond mine, my lady."

"That company is involved," Marasi said. "Did your agents notice anything odd about the factory?"

Codenames flipped through one of their files. "Uh … let's see … Curious. The woman we had watching this location says it's mostly shut down, because very little is ever shipped out of it."

"But things are shipped in?" Marasi said, growing excited. "Maybe an oddly large number of deliveries, given that the factory barely seems to be doing anything?”

“Yes,” Codenames said. “Our agent didn’t put that together, but yes. From the shipping manifests here … Why are they taking in so much, if they’re not making anything?”

“Because those aren’t supplies for the factory,” Moonlight said, meeting Marasi’s eyes. “They’re stockpiles of food and arms for the cavern underneath. This is our incursion point.”

“I agree,” Marasi said. “There has to be an entrance to the caverns there, and maybe it will be less guarded than the central spire. We strike here.”

“We can get there quickly by rail,” Moonlight said. “The section leading from here to there is finished and running.”

“Wait,” TwinSoul said. “How urgent is this threat?”

“We have reason to believe,” Marasi said, “that the Set has developed a bomb capable of wiping out Elendel. Harmony is blinded, and we know the Set have been developing a device capable of delivering their bomb from a great distance.”

“They have a dark god breathing down their necks,” Moonlight added. “Demanding results. They were supposed to put their plan into motion weeks ago. And with Marasi and her friends getting close … well, they have *every incentive* to launch that bomb the moment they can. It could happen at any time.”

“By the first aether…” he whispered, glancing at Codenames, whose eyes had gone wide. “Moonlight. We should contact the master.”

“You’re right,” Moonlight said. “I hate delaying, but … Codenames, is your special friend nearby?”

“Upstairs,” she said, scrambling out of the room. “I’ll go grab him.”

“The master?” Marasi said. “You mean…”

“Yes,” Moonlight said. “It’s time to talk to Kelsier.”

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Codenames's "friend" turned out to be a glowing sphere of light the size of a child's head—though perfectly symmetrical and marked at the center with an arcane symbol.

It floated over to Marasi, then bobbed in the air and spoke with a soft masculine voice. She didn't understand the strange words.

"Was that … some kind of spell?" she whispered to Moonlight.

"He said he was pleased to meet you," Codenames said. "And complimented your hair."

"Oh," Marasi said, transfixed by the glowing orb. Nothing held it up; it simply floated, shimmering with a pure white glow, tinged with mother-of-pearl.

Codenames spoke to the sphere in the same language, and it bobbed again, then began to shift and change. It melded into the shape of a person's head—a man with strong, angular features. She was shocked to find that most of the paintings and statues of the Survivor were accurate. Except for the spike through his right eye—a feature that was replicated in the light, same as the rest of his head and hair.

"I'm not surprised to hear from you," he said. "Something's wrong, isn't it?"

"Maybe?" Codenames said. "Honestly, we're not certain, Kell. But TwinSoul said we should contact you."

"Is he there?" Kelsier asked.

“Present, my lord,” TwinSoul said, bowing his head to the reproduction of the man’s face—though Kelsier didn’t seem to be able to see him. “Also present is Moonlight, and … a visitor. One Marasi Colms.”

The Survivor’s image cocked an eyebrow at that. “Marasi Colms. We’ve been watching you.”

Marasi stammered. This man was the center of her religion—she’d prayed to him as a child. And while she wasn’t as observant as Steris, it was still … daunting to meet him.

He didn’t express anger that she was there. Another indication that Moonlight had been playing up that aspect, perhaps to make Marasi feel she was getting away with something.

“Report?” Kelsier asked.

“Dawnshot is in Bilming,” Moonlight said, “and thinks the Set is moving soon. Within the day.”

“Harmony is blinded, Lord Survivor,” Marasi said, piping up. “He admitted it to Wax. He can’t see anything, but … sir … he’s frightened.”

“Damn,” Kelsier said. “I’m twelve hours away, moving quickly via airship.”

“That … may not be soon enough, Kell,” Moonlight said.

“My lord,” TwinSoul said, “Moonlight has recovered some disturbing intel. It appears that the Set has discovered the relationship between harmonium and trellium. Beyond that, they’ve been experimenting with long-range delivery devices. They’re prepared to do something stupid.”

“Not so much stupid as desperate,” Kelsier said. “They know that Autonomy has declared this entire planet anathema. The Set is fighting for survival the only way they know how: by trying to destroy Elendel, to prove to Autonomy they can rule the planet. I thought we had more time though. Why now?”

“No idea,” Moonlight said. “But there’s talk of a new ashfall. I’ve never heard *that* before. Plus, we have a *photo* here of a destroyed city. Maybe … they tried it out somewhere else, and photographed the results? At any rate, it implies something more than bombing Elendel.”

“There have always been two plans,” Codenames said. “Autonomy wants to do something catastrophic to the entire planet—the ashfalls could be their plan for that. But the Set is hoping to prove it can dominate the Basin, and that the more extreme measure isn't needed. Like cutting off a finger to prevent the infection from spreading."

The room fell silent, Marasi feeling overwhelmed. They spoke of the end of a planet, *her* planet, as if it were something that they'd known was a possibility for some time. But then again, she was *literally* in a conversation with the Survivor … so …

"Sir," she said. "Um, Lord Kelsier? I believe they are close to launching this bomb. I intend to stop them, but I'm just one woman. I wouldn't mind help. Anything you can offer."

"I don't have the luxury of holding back," Kelsier said more softly. "I shouldn't have left for the South. I thought Saze would stop it before it got this far … We need to do what he cannot. Miss Colms, you have our help. Codenames, how many full Ghostblood agents do we have in Bilming?"

"Um…" Codenames said. "Only us three. Everyone else is in Elendel or on assignment elsewhere in the field."

"How quickly can we get the Elendel agents to Bilming?" Kelsier asked.

"Not quickly enough," Moonlight said. "They're all embedded, so we'd have to use dead drops. We could have them roused by early evening, maybe late afternoon, but they would still be several hours away in Elendel."

"Send them to my sister," Marasi said. "She's trying to facilitate an evacuation via the Elendel government."

Kelsier sniffed softly. He didn't seem to have much respect for the Elendel government. "Codenames, you take Dae-oh and see to it. I doubt the field team needs a philologist for this mission. Also alert our members around the Basin. Shri Prasanva, I hate to pull you from your quiet evenings of scholarship, but I fear we're going to need your help."

The elderly TwinSoul stood up straight, then bowed to the floating head. "We are eager to serve, my lord. Silajana sends his regards, and wishes he could send more of his aetherbound to aid in your fight."

"I appreciate the sentiment," Kelsier said. "You and Moonlight are to assist Miss Colms. In fact, I think it is time to do something drastic. Take the stores of purified Dor. The Command is ‘Respect.’ Authorize the other cells to access theirs as well, and pass the Command to them.”

Codenames gasped. Marasi had no idea what purified Dor was, but even Moonlight seemed impressed.

“Do what you can,” Kelsier said. “I will try to accelerate my arrival, but the truth is that I don’t know how much I can do. I’m traveling over water, and so can’t go much faster than I currently am. Dropping things to Steelpush off doesn’t do much with an ocean underneath you.”

“We will stop this, my lord,” TwinSoul said. “Whatever is happening, we will interrupt it. You shall arrive back in Elendel to find a pristine and welcoming city.”

“I’ll settle for the normal dirty, grouchy city, TwinSoul,” Kelsier said. “Go. I’ll see if I can shake Harmony out of his stupor. At least he sent Dawnshot; that convinces me the threat is real. Anything that makes Saze take action these days is to be considered significant.”

The face melted back into the sphere, and the communication was over. The three immediately burst into motion, going in separate directions. Marasi decided to stick with Moonlight, who rushed to a different room—which required opening another mystical lock. Inside was an armory that would have made Ranette delirious with glee. Guns on the walls, vials of metals in racks, glass knives and dueling canes. A large chain-fed machine gun and some explosives.

Moonlight ignored it all, rushing straight for a safe in the corner. It had no combination or locking mechanism that Marasi could see, though as she peered over Moonlight’s shoulder the woman put her hand on the front and said, “Respect me.” Some mechanism inside clicked, and the door opened.

“Another … what was it … Identity lock?” Marasi asked.

“No, this is even more secure,” Moonlight said. “It’s a lock that is Awake, and can tell from your Intent if you’ve been given a passcode or if you’ve stolen it.”

A lock … that was awake? As in *alive*?

Inside were only three items: a trio of identical glowing jars, big enough that you’d have trouble carrying them in one hand. The glow was similar to the sphere that had followed Codenames, but more intense. Each jar outshone the room’s electric lights.

Moonlight took one, the light shining on her face, and turned it over. Awed.

“What is it?” Marasi whispered.

“Concentrated Investiture,” Moonlight said. “Unkeyed from any Identity. This is an energy source that can power things like your Metallic Arts.”

“Those are powered by the gods.”

“Exactly,” Moonlight said. “This power comes from a god’s corpse. Two of them actually, intermingled. It’s *exceptionally* difficult to recover. The things that you could do with this … well, that *I* could do with this. You’d only be able to use it as a hyperefficient replacement for your metals. You don’t know how good you have it here on Scadrial, being able to power your abilities with something so common.”

“And your abilities?” Marasi asked. “What are they powered by?”

Moonlight smiled. She hadn’t admitted to any abilities, but so far Marasi had seen a man who could create objects from crystal, a woman with a pet … sphere … and Moonlight, who seemed fairly high in their organization. So what was she capable of doing?

Moonlight packed the three jars in a rucksack, wrapped in some cushioning, then filled it with other supplies, including a few explosives. She threw the sack over her shoulder and took a few guns from the wall. Marasi, with permission, helped herself to a fine-looking rifle—along with an innocent-looking case to carry it in—and some aluminum ammunition. They had it in plenitude here.

“Electrolysis,” Moonlight noted. “Aluminum is actually pretty easy to make, once you know the process.”

“Wait,” Marasi said, hurrying to join her as they left the room, “you can make aluminum with *electrolysis*?”

“Yeah,” Moonlight said. “We’ve been using it to fund our operations for almost two decades now. I’d bet half the aluminum in the Basin came from us originally.”

“And you’re casually letting me in on the secret?”

“It’s a free sample,” Moonlight said. “Besides, Dean—he’s our chemist back in Elendel—is convinced you’ll find the secret soon, and the value will plummet. Dean thinks aluminum will soon be cheaper than tin.”

Cheaper than *tin*? Preservation! If every criminal could afford bullets to kill Allomancers, and every citizen could keep a band of aluminum in their hat to prevent emotional Allomancy, it …

Well, it would change the world.

“All of this,” Moonlight said, “is merely the surface, Marasi.”

“Why me?” Marasi asked. “Why not Wax?”

“He’s spoken for,” Moonlight said. “Besides, Kelsier prefers people like us. The discarded, the ignored. And Wax is a little … brazen. People watch him. Track him. Pay attention to him. Not our style, for all that Kell likes to be the center of attention.”

“Plus, I suppose,” Marasi said with some thought, “having access to a high-ranking constable is useful.”

“There’s also your uncommon connection to the Malwish,” Moonlight said.

“Allik?” Marasi said, amused. “He’s wonderful—don’t get me wrong—but I think you’d find him to be a little less … well-connected than you’re assuming.”

Rusts. She hoped he’d gotten out of the city. Her gut said that he would go if she asked. There was a certain practicality to Allik that she loved—he was wonderfully, beautifully genuine.

In her line of work, she met so many who made her question the nature of humanity. But then she’d go home and find all the reminders in the world of the best that people could be. And somehow, he was all hers.

Back in the main room, the model of the city had started to crumble. It didn’t disintegrate as quickly as the cup had; something made the stone linger sometimes but immediately vanish other times. The chair, for example, still seemed fully sturdy.

Moonlight waved for Marasi to follow her out into the foyer. Here, TwinSoul walked down the steps, gripping the banister tightly for support, wearing a backpack that she thought—from the way it moved, and from the hose draped over his shoulder—might be filled entirely with water.

He’d changed outfits, and now wore some kind of loose-fitting uniform with a bright yellow sash around his waist. He’d strapped on a sword—a slightly curved one in an ornate golden sheath. As he reached the ground floor, he nodded to Moonlight. “Codenames is going to send some messages,” he said, “and so can wait for that other woman you sent to reach safety here. I think it is time for the three of us to be about the job. You retrieved the Dor?”

Moonlight tapped her rucksack.

“Excellent,” he said, turning to Marasi. “I have been commanded to follow your lead, my lady. With Silajana’s blessing and yours, we strike forward. If there is danger, I vow that I shall fight to protect you.”

“This … could be dangerous,” Marasi said, glancing at his ornate sword, noting how unstable on his feet he was. “I’m sure we could use your help, TwinSoul, but … I don’t know that you should be doing any fighting. Perhaps we two could strike ahead, and call for you when we need your specialized skills?”

“I promise I will not slow you down, my lady,” he said. “I have been tasked with aiding you by the Survivor himself.”

He said it with calm respect, but his posture and attitude whispered something else. *I’m going with you, young woman. Best not to argue the point any further.*

Right, then. Marasi glanced at Moonlight, who nodded to her. Despite their knowledge and experience, this was Marasi’s mission. She was in charge. Good.

“Where’s the nearest train station?” she asked. “We need to get to that factory as quickly as possible.”

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It was late afternoon by the time Wax got into position at the lord mayor's mansion, the Silver House. Though nightfall was hours away, he hoped—as he did every day—that the mists would come tonight. It felt like forever since he'd been out in them. Not only did they seem to come less often these days, he also had less occasion to go out at night. The mists felt like a friend from his youth that he still knew but rarely talked to.

He'd been at this all day, having left Elendel a few hours before dawn, but fatigue felt distant regardless. As four fifteen hit, Wax burst into motion. Wayne should have his distraction going in full, which gave Wax the opportunity to bolt across the springy grass to the mayor's mansion. He dropped a bullet and Pushed up to the second floor.

There, he grabbed the outer windowsill and gave a quick Push to the mechanism inside, which should undo the latch …

The window rattled, but didn't unlatch. Drat. It had a full lock, one a Push couldn't undo.

All right. He increased his weight manyfold, and a quick *Push* cracked the window and bent the lock, letting him force the window open and pull himself inside.

His boots thumped down on a carpeted floor. The place was messy, but not cluttered. Piles of papers occupied the desk and the nearby tables. A small bar held a collection of spirits, half the tops off, the other half put haphazardly back on the wrong bottle. Books lined a shelf, some put in spine first, others reversed, and a good third of them slumped to the side because the ones at the far end had been removed, leaving the whole thing to slouch like sleepy guards on watch duty.

It was in many ways the opposite of Copper's flat. That had been sterile, pristine. This was lived in. It had the air of a place full of secrets—because a man as important as Gave would employ a fleet of maids and servants to keep things tidy. Except in this room.

Wax didn't have a lot to go on. But the lord mayor *was* involved in whatever the Set was planning—and involvement on that level would leave traces. A bomb somewhere in this city was pointed at Elendel, and this room held the clues that would lead him to it. But where?

Wax sorted quickly through the pages on the desk. Wayne was probably doing Grandma's Been at the Vodka, his favorite ploy for drawing attention but not gunfire. Unfortunately, the Set would be on the lookout for his tricks. They'd created a Metalborn designed specifically to face Wayne. They would know about his propensity for disguises.

The papers didn't give him much. Some shipping manifests to a factory on the outskirts of town. A stack of broadsheets with editorials circled that were critical of Gave. And another, newer stack of them with no such problems. He opened the desk, and there found a curious number of letters from noblemen and noblewomen in Elendel.

Wax recognized several of the names, including Vennis Hasting—one of the more powerful senators. He scanned a letter from him, and it touched on nothing incriminating. Though it mentioned trade negotiations, most of it was pleasantries.

Frowning, Wax fished in his coat pocket and brought out another letter, the extremely incriminating one—also from Vennis Hasting—that Maraga had given him. He was missing pieces here. When had they moved from pleasantries to discussing the destruction of the world?

For now, he stuffed both letters into his pocket. Gave and Vennis were colluding, but he had already known that. He needed a lead on where to find the bomb. Fortunately, after a little more hunting he struck gold. Gave Entrone's calendar.

People usually made certain to hide the most important documents and information. They'd lock up their plans and schemes, but often forgot simple things like calendars. To a trained detective, knowing where you'd been—and where you planned to be—could be incriminating. Back in the Roughs, he'd often had to piece a person's schedule together through interviews and interrogations. But in a modern city, people tended to write it down for him.

The desk calendar was the wide and flat type that displayed an entire month, one day to a box. Previous months had been folded back behind, and were covered in notations in two hands: A sloppier one that, from the letters, Wax assumed was Gave's. And a neater hand that likely belonged to a secretary.

Lots of visits to something called the lab, Wax thought. *With tight scheduling between meetings here at the mansion. So the lab is close, or he has some direct method of getting to it …*

Another spot listed *trajectory and distance tests*, and that was surrounded by several empty days. So he'd needed to travel some way for that. Curious. Where could they have launched delivery devices a long distance without drawing attention?

Wax looked up as he heard some muffled shouts. Wayne's distraction was working. He kept searching, scanning for anything suspicious, and something struck him a moment later.

There were no appointments after today.

A coldness spread through Wax as he looked at the last appointment, in Gave's own hand. It simply said, *They arrive.* Rusts. What did that mean?

There wasn't the time for analysis, so he ripped off the sheets—even though that would reveal he'd been here—and moved on. Confident he'd learned what he could from the desk, he tried an old Coinshot's trick: burning steel.

Little blue lines spread from his chest toward viable sources of metal. Most of these were faint, indicating nails in the walls and furniture. Light fixtures, doorknobs, even unseen wires for electricity. More and more, their lives were surrounded by metal—glints of it facilitating everything from the incandescent bulb to the nib in the pen on the desk. He knew some people felt that the day of the Metalborn was over, that modern advances would equalize all people and diminish the advantages of Allomancer and Feruchemist.

Yet he had trained himself—with practice—to put out the lights in a room by distorting the wires in the walls. His versatility improved with each new discovery. And as more metal outlined their lives, he was able to see more and more details of rooms.

He spotted no hidden chambers in the desk, but he did locate the room's safe. Hidden not behind a picture or a bookshelf, but in the floor under a couch—which was a more common spot than the other two, despite popular lore.

Wax set to it quickly. For all his levity, Wayne would be in serious danger during this distraction. Wax didn't want to leave him too long—indeed, Wax heard more cries and shouts as he shoved the couch aside. They were getting louder. The enemy might already be on to him.

The safe had an Allomantic lock. No visible keyhole or combination. It would be opened with Pushes if he was lucky, Pulls if he was unlucky. Wax squinted, judging the metal lines. There was the giant blue one leading to the safe itself, of course. Many Allomancers would stop with that, never realizing that if you peered closer—if you let the lines start to drift and separate …

One giant line became many smaller ones, all connecting him to the various mechanisms inside. Pins you could Push in a specific order to unlock the thing. He got to work as the shouts outside grew more urgent. These kinds of locks were secure against most people, and even most Allomancers. But there was a weakness. Wax carefully, subtly Pushed each pin in turn, wiggling them until he found the one that activated a tumbler.

That would be the first. He nudged it and was rewarded when it locked into place. He was in luck—this was a mechanism meant for one who could Push, not Pull. He should be able to open it, though even many Coinshots would have trouble with something this subtle.

First tumbler in place, he wiggled each remaining pin to find the second. Easy. He quickly located the third, Pushed it, and—

And the lock reset.

Wax froze, a bead of sweat trickling down his cheek. What had he done wrong? He forced himself, despite the growing noise outside, to go through it again. Again, the lock reset after he Pushed the third pin.

He pounded the floor in frustration until the answer struck him. This wasn't a lock designed for someone who could Push *or* Pull. It was designed for someone who could do both. The third pin required a Pull.

In short, it was a lock designed for a Mistborn to open. Or in this case, someone using Hemalurgy to cheat.

Which meant he was out of luck. He'd never get this open, not unless he could rip it out and do his Pushes from both sides … He didn't have time for that. And there was something more going on outside. Shouts. Alarms, and …

And was that *smoke* he smelled?

Rusts. Wax did a quick scan of the room for anything else he could investigate. There wasn't …

Wait. That pattern of metal in the floor. Wooden boards in regular straight rows, nailed down in lines. Except for one square of nails underneath the rug.

Trapdoor, he thought, and shoved the rug aside, feeling about until he located the hidden latch. Entrone had the spikes to make him an Allomancer and was quite enamored with his powers, judging by that safe. But he didn't have the *experience* of someone who'd grown up with their powers. A seasoned Coinshot could pick out that pattern of nails in the same way a square of new paint on an old wall would stand out.

The trapdoor led to a very narrow shaft with a wooden ladder. Probably between two walls on the first floor, down into a basement.

As smoke began to stream in around the door and he heard shouts for a fire brigade—along with feet thumping along the hallway outside—Wax decided to abandon the safe. He slipped onto the ladder, then pulled the trapdoor closed behind him. Hoping that wherever this led, it would point him in the right direction.

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It was odd for Marasi to feel such urgency while sitting and waiting.

The elevated train of Bilming lived up to its reputation. The group of them sat in a private compartment, speeding around the city, bypassing traffic congestion. The train stopped frequently, but each time it did, it bolted back into motion with a jarring acceleration.

It felt almost like she was a Coinshot, each burst of speed from the train a fresh Push launching them ever closer to their destination. She'd read of the Ascendant Warrior's Flight of Destiny in the Words of Founding, when she'd returned to Luthadel at the last minute to save Harmony. In the stories, Vin had traveled a miraculous distance in mere hours.

Now, Marasi likely traveled at that same speed. In cushioned comfort, with a cool breeze piped in from outside. They carried weapons hidden in cases or sacks, and Marasi still wore the simple trousers and shirt she'd donned for her sting. Moonlight was dressed as a Bilming constable, and TwinSoul had shrouded himself in a local fisherman's raincloak. She'd initially worried that his suit and colorful sash would stand out, but he clearly knew how to be inconspicuous.

"For this to work," Marasi said to them, "I need to understand our resources. That means, Moonlight, I *really* need to know what you're capable of."

"Art criticism," she said. "Fighting, if needed. Wisecracks when appropriate."

"I meant any extraordinary abilities," Marasi said.

“Her wisecracks *are* extraordinary,” TwinSoul said, his eyes twinkling. “Why, they’re so remarkable that I quite often can’t see which part of them is supposed to be wise.”

Moonlight, in turn, rolled her eyes. “I have three soulstamps on me at the moment: two universal stamps, one Essence Mark. It takes time and preparation to create more—time we don’t have—so we’ll have to rely on these ones. I can use each stamp multiple times, but no use will last long, since they weren’t … Right, you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

“Moonlight,” TwinSoul explained, “has stamps that rewrite the nature of the objects she encounters. One makes a doorway appear where none previously existed. The second repairs a broken or worn object, to make it look new. Is that correct?”

Moonlight nodded. “It’s something I’m practicing still—stamps that will work on any object, I mean. Requires Invested ink, on this planet, but we’ve got the process mostly working.”

“So you can make a door appear,” Marasi said. “And you can make an object that was broken become new? How many times?”

“As often as I want,” Moonlight said. “But only for a limited period in each case.”

“Wow,” Marasi whispered. “That’s … magic?”

“Is Allomancy magic?” Moonlight asked.

“Of course not,” Marasi said.

“Neither is this,” Moonlight said. “To repair something, I merely rewrite the past, making the object think it was well-maintained or never broke. Like I said, universal stamps are a new technology. I don’t have them working perfectly yet, but they’ll do for now.”

It felt magical to Marasi regardless. Allomancy was one thing—it made perfect sense to be able to use metal to Push on other pieces of metal. But rewriting the past of an object? How was that *not* magical?

“You said you have three stamps,” Marasi said. “What’s the third?”

“It’s for emergencies.” Moonlight shifted in her seat. “The other two work on nonliving objects only. This one changes a person—me, specifically—in dramatic ways. I avoid using it if possible.”

Marasi glanced at TwinSoul, who shook his head in a “leave it alone” sort of way. Well, all right. She hated going into a potential fight without knowing what her options and advantages were, but at least she’d learned something.

The train slowed at a stop, causing them all to lean in their seats at the change in momentum. People piled into the corridor between compartments outside, waiting to flood out into the station.

“And you, TwinSoul?” Marasi asked. “Is there a limit to the things you can make?”

“Alas,” he said, nudging his backpack, which was on the floor, “there are indeed serious limits. I can only maintain roseite objects under certain fields of Investiture. Some planets have those naturally, but yours does not, so my roseite creations—outside of our safehouse—must be touching me, or they will disintegrate. It also requires water, drawn from my body, to fuel the creations.

“Beyond that, my ability to form objects is limited by my personal skill and understanding. I cannot make you a gun, for example. The mechanics are beyond this old mind, and the intricacies too fine. Simple tools are the extent of my abilities, though Silajana has bonded some more talented than I in that regard.”

“Sil-ah-janah,” Marasi said, trying to form the unfamiliar sounds. “That is your … god?”

“Both less and more than a god,” he explained. “Silajana is one of the primal aethers. They predate Adonalsium, you know, and exist outside of his power.”

“They predate the Shattering,” Moonlight said. “That *doesn’t* mean they predate Adonalsium.”

“To my people, this is a sacred tenet,” he said to Marasi, ignoring Moonlight. “The primal aethers grant some people a bud of their core.” He raised his right hand, revealing a transparent web of stone embedded in his palm, and let light from the window shine through as he held it up before the glass. She could see the bones inside, and it seemed the crystal had somehow entirely replaced his flesh and muscles in that spot.

“This bud connects me to Silajana,” he continued, “and through him to all of his other aetherbound. He is the core, and we his web. He is eternal, and we his mortal agents in the cosmere.”

That was … a lot to take in. But Marasi supposed that all that mattered was that he was willing to help. “Thank you for joining our fight,” she said. “I’m glad that Silajana could spare you.”

“There is little else for us now,” he said, looking out the window. “Until we can return home…”

“I’m willing to go with you, Pras,” Moonlight said. “If you want to try.”

“The forces in my homeland are too strong, too deadly,” he said. “Silajana says we must remain in exile. He will decide when and if we are to return. He would not risk another extermination.”

The train bolted forward again, causing them all to lean the other direction in their seats. Only three more stops until they arrived.

“Moonlight, can your door stamp help us get into the enemy base?” Marasi asked.

“It will depend on the building materials,” she said. “This stamp pretends the people who constructed the place installed a door. It’ll be touch and go for it to work on things like natural rock.”

“Then we can sneak into the factory from any direction,” Marasi said, “and then find the way down into the caverns.”

“They’ve been moving a lot of supplies,” Moonlight said. “Large crates of equipment and food. So I doubt we’re looking for some hidden stairwell.”

“You’re right,” Marasi agreed. “There will likely be a freight elevator in the main loading bay. Good assumption.”

“We could attempt,” TwinSoul said, “to pretend to be members of their organization, making a delivery. Perhaps we could hijack a supply truck on the way?”

“Tried that,” Marasi said. “It was kind of a mess. I’d rather be more stealthy.”

“I agree,” Moonlight said. “I suggest we scout the location, find an empty room at the rear, and create a door. They’ll have their security focused on entry points, which we can avoid. From there we make our way to the cargo docks and locate the elevator.”

A reasonable enough plan. Though Marasi’s anxiety increased the closer they came to their destination. Soon the train lurched to a stop, and the three of them piled off. She worried the long case she was carrying—with her borrowed rifle hidden inside—would draw attention, but no one gave her so much as a second glance. Perhaps they thought it was some kind of musical instrument. More likely, they didn’t care.

Neither of Marasi’s companions were of a Scadrian ethnicity, but Moonlight kept a hat on to shade her eyes. She was shorter than most from Marasi’s world, but there was no telling if that was a trait of her people, or an individual body shape. TwinSoul, in contrast, was tall and lanky. His darker skin tone stood out on the street, but most would just assume he had Terris blood—that people’s colorations varied far more than those of people with old Central Dominance heritage, like Marasi.

Plus, there was a lot of variety in dress in this city. People seemed to eschew the dark browns and blacks that were more common in Elendel. Vibrant colors, often clashing, were part of the style here. With other oddities too. In the train station alone, they passed a costumed mascot trying to hand out flyers for a furniture store, a couple of masked Malwish tourists, and a koloss-blooded woman in a suit.

Outside the station, atop the platform with steps leading to the streets below, they spotted their target in the near distance: an old brown-brick factory with a mottled sign out front. Even this futuristic city had less-desirable sections of town; many were hidden away beneath the tracks.

Marasi had hoped to find the building quiet, since the Ghostblood spy’s records had indicated infrequent supply drops in recent weeks. Today, unfortunately, the building was buzzing with activity—some half a dozen trucks loading up and pulling out through a large bay door at the side of the structure.

“Well,” Moonlight said, “little doubt where the loading bay is. We’ll probably find the elevator in there.”

“Inside the bay,” TwinSoul said, “that is currently full of enemy forces?”

“Yeah…”

“What if,” Marasi said, “we came into the elevator from the back? You can make a door in any wall, right? What if we made one into the elevator from behind?”

“That’s possible,” Moonlight said. “Though I’m not comfortable with how busy it looks. We were hoping to slip in during a quiet moment.”

Marasi agreed—though as she considered it, she realized that had been naive of them. The Set knew that they were in Bilming and actively trying to stop them …

Marasi hesitated as she watched several of the trucks roar away from the factory, heading toward the hill with the government offices. Then she found herself smiling.

“They’re worried about Wax,” she said. “They’re marshalling troops, gathering resources … I’ll bet they’re sending it all to deal with him.”

“Maybe,” Moonlight said.

“Trust me,” Marasi said. “Where Wax goes, fireworks follow. The Set is worried about him—and they likely know exactly where he is. Flying through the air does tend to make him conspicuous.”

“If you’re correct, my lady,” TwinSoul said, “then they might not be expecting our incursion here. Their eyes may be diverted toward Dawnshot.” More trucks pulled away, and TwinSoul pointed toward the northern side of the city, where a giant plume of dark smoke was rising. “That’s the mayor’s mansion. Perhaps Dawnshot is being … extra difficult?”

“I’ll take it,” Marasi said, leading the way down the steps. “Let’s strike while everyone is distracted.”

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Everyone in the room—including the kandra—gathered around Steris to read the letter Wax had sent. Perhaps they didn't trust her to deliver the information out loud, or perhaps they needed to see it with their own eyes.

> *Bomb is confirmed real, and already fabricated. City-destroying capacity. Enemy is trying to find a way to deliver it to Elendel. It's time to evacuate the city.*
>
> *They know I'm after them. I hope that my presence won't cause them to do anything rash. Investigation suggests attempts to deliver by train or road failed and they seek alternative, perhaps some kind of self-propelled artillery shell. Regardless, I suggest you close off all routes into Elendel as a precaution.*
>
> *There is conflict among the Set. Some want to destroy Elendel, others maybe the entire Basin by restarting the Ashmounts, judging by a strange photograph we've found. I may be able to exploit the schism between them. Either way, my primary objective is neutralizing the bomb's delivery mechanism.*
>
> *Get as many people out as you can, as quickly as possible, in case I fail.*
>
> *I love you.*
> *Waxillium*

Adawathwyn immediately ordered the young radio operator sequestered—along with anyone who might have heard the communication. Everyone else in the room slumped into chairs at the table, and several looked to TenSoon.

"We should believe Dawnshot," he said. "Harmony has long thought the enemy was working on something like this. The deadline is … far more urgent than we realized. Rusts. We need to take this *very* seriously."

"I am forced to agree," Adawathwyn—of all people—said. "I don't much like Ladrian, but … this news, with a kandra confirming it … My lord governor, it seems we have a gun to our heads."

The governor leaned forward on the table, grim.

Finally, Steris thought, releasing a held breath. *They are giving this the attention it deserves.* Maybe now she could get something done.

"Time is of the essence," the governor said, looking around the table at the three senators and his vice governor. "If there really is a bomb … we have to move fast."

"Agreed," Lord Cett said. "How quickly can we get out of the city?"

"That depends," the governor said. "Ambassador Daal? Can I take that airship ride now?"

"So long as the streets aren't packed," Adawathwyn said, "we can theoretically be out of the city via motorcade in under an hour."

"Will that be quickly enough?" Lady Hammondess said. "What is the destructive radius of this weapon, kandra? How far away do we have to get to be safe?"

"I'll send for our families," the governor said. "We have to do this quietly though, to not inspire a mass panic."

Steris closed her eyes, feeling sick. On one hand, she understood their emotions. After all, she had sent her children away immediately.

At the same time … Rusts. They were all going to run, weren't they? She met Constable Reddi's eyes. He'd slumped in his chair, looking numb. Sworn to protect the people of the city, and there was nothing he could do. Nothing but sit here and dread what was coming.

She didn't have to do that. She'd dreaded it already. That was the purpose of her lists. She realized, with shock, that her method was actually working. She didn't feel afraid. She didn't feel anxious.

She could function.

She had to evacuate the city.

Steris pulled out one of her thickest notebooks, thumping it down on the table. As everyone else started calling for aides to prepare their escapes, she gathered her thoughts and flipped through her notes. She had seven detailed evacuation plans for the city. Which was best in this situation?

After a few minutes though, the governor ordered the door shut again and all aides temporarily expelled. The room's anxious occupants turned toward him.

"Um," he said, "Adawathwyn has a suggestion."

She had composed herself quickly and now stood up in her immaculate Terris robes, hands out invitingly. "The situation is indeed dire. But I have realized we have a solution … upon our arms, so to speak. Lord Waxillium says that there is likely some kind of device that will launch the bomb all the way to our city. But we have Metalborn at our disposal. The greatest wealth of them in all the Basin.

"We should gather Coinshots and station them to Push this weapon away. We can position them atop our highest structures, to watch for the weapon's arrival—or, better, keep people on call in Bilming, watching. They'll be able to tell us when it has launched."

"Pardon me, Adawathwyn," Steris said. "Have you ever been in a situation where modern weapons fire is discharged? Have you *seen* the speed at which it moves? Trust me. If this weapon is launched, when it reaches Elendel, it will impact too quickly for an Allomancer to stop."

The vice governor wilted for a second, then her eyes widened. "What if," she said, "we had an Allomancer with access to all the abilities and powers of the Lord Ruler?"

Several in the room gasped. Daal stood up straight, his masked eyes fixated on Adawathwyn.

"It's an emergency," she said. "A *true* emergency. The entire city is in danger! We need someone who can think the thoughts of a thousand people, someone who can move planets and raise mountains. We need … the Bands of Mourning."

Bother.

First off, the Bands didn’t work *that* way. They gave a person supercharged metallic abilities—yes—but they didn’t contain “all the powers of the Lord Ruler.” Unfortunately, the mythology surrounding them and Wax’s use of them had only grown over the years.

That said, Steris *had* considered using the Bands—they often factored into her calculations. A powerful relic created by the Survivor—or maybe the Lord Ruler—which granted vast Metalborn powers to the holder wasn’t the sort of thing one ignored.

“We can’t use the Bands,” Steris said. “The people of Elendel made a promise. The foundation of a treaty.”

Behind them, Admiral Daal—so quiet through most of the meeting—approached the table. “The Bands of Mourning,” he said, “were entrusted to the Faceless Immortals, under the *strict understanding* that the Bands would *never* be employed by your people.”

Technically, the Bands weren’t to be employed unless the Malwish attacked Elendel. That had been the actual deal, a way of making certain that Malwish aggression didn’t go too far.

“Surely, Ambassador,” Adawathwyn said, “you can see our need for self-preservation. You wouldn’t deny us the means, in this dire emergency, to protect ourselves from this calamity?”

“Surely,” Ambassador Daal said, “*you* understand that any action by those in the Basin using this *sacred* relic—however dire the situation—must be seen as an act of aggression against my people. You don’t think we’ve suffered catastrophes that *we* wish we could have used the Bands to stop? We could have been using them to save lives these past six years! But our agreement was that they were too powerful for *anyone* to use.”

The room fell silent. *He’s playing some kind of game here,* Steris thought. She couldn’t fathom what.

“We…” the governor said, licking his lips. “We should fetch them. If an Allomancer with enhanced speed of thought could Push away this bomb before it lands, that gives us a chance.”

“They don’t have as much power as you think,” Steris said. “They can’t accomplish that.”

“Actually,” TenSoon said, “there’s a possibility.”

“What?” Steris asked.

“There are … things about the interactions of the powers you don’t know,” he said. “I have only hints. I think it might be possible … to send the bomb away using the Bands. But the deal we made…”

“Holy One,” the governor said, “what would Harmony say, should it come down to our survival as a city or betraying the Malwish trust. What are his wishes?”

TenSoon stood quietly for a moment, then spoke with a growling voice. “I will fetch the Bands.”

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of eager fans, "to train dear Handerwym in the ways of

More details on back: Why the judge let Jak keep the tiger

and leeched her steel reserves.

"Give me the compass," I said, "and we'll leave you at the next outcropping."

Vila peered over her shoulder at the approaching stone where the Haunted Man waited.

She glanced at me, her eyes wide, no doubt realizing that without any steel, she couldn't Coinshot away. She was trapped. In her surprise, she forgot to hold onto anything but the compass.

I had not planned on that.

"No!" I screamed, immediately dropping my parasol and reaching for Vila. I serendipitously caught her by the lace of her frilly coat.

"You saved me?" she asked. "Don't you want me to fall?"

"Harmony no," I said.

She clocked me in the face with the compass, which honestly was a bad move on her part. I instinctively let go of her.

As Vila fell, I keeled forward, trying to catch her again, but serendipity is a fickle thing, and my hand missed hers by a hair. Horrified, I watched the mists swallow her. The sudden shifting of my weight, however, threw me from the claw.

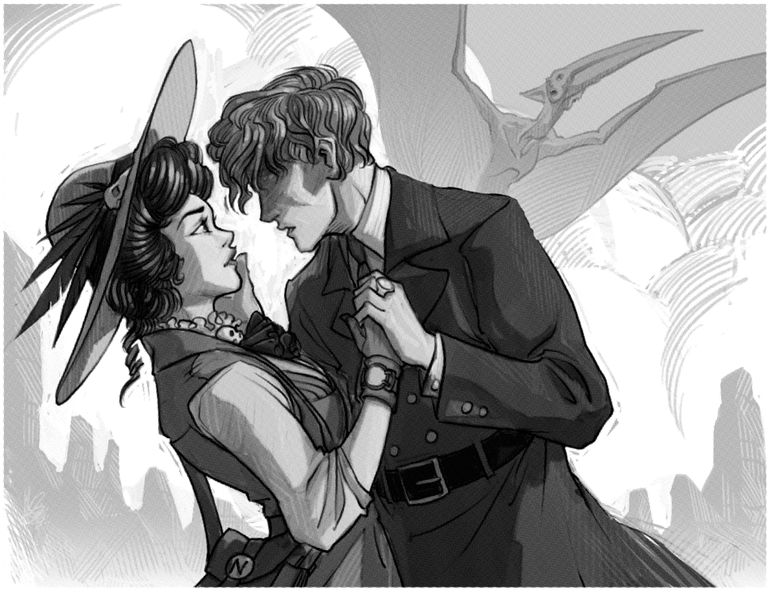
Suddenly weightless, I feared this might be the end.

Then I felt air pushed by large wings. A claw snatched me and dropped me on the outcropping next to the Haunted Man.

I slid to a stop just shy of the edge, my custom Miele Jedon boots sending pebbles clacking over the side. Bless those shoes and their fashionable yet grippy soles. (You can get a pair at Ardenne's on 9th. They're custom, yes, but drop my name, and the clerks there will be keen to help.)

Heart thumping, my breath coming in gasps, I searched the top of the outcropping. "The compass...we should scour the cliffs!"

Tabaar-KeSun landed and opened their other claw. The compass rolled out, and I snatched it up. Before I could thank them, the Haunted Man took my hand and stared at me with intense, desperate eyes. Given his usual scowl, this new expression was as foreign on him as cheap perfume would be on me.



"My dearest Nicelle," he said, gifting me a rare smile.

"What is it?" I asked, inspecting myself for wounds. Though I'd lost a few buttons from my blouse, at least I hadn't lost the whole shirt, which always happened to Jak at this point in his stories. "I'm fine. I promise."

"You almost fell," he said, cupping my cheek in one of his large, rough hands.

Heat boiled up from my heart, and I couldn't help but smile back. How far we had come from our first meeting!

"You silly man. You'll never get rid of me that easily," I said. "It's you and me exploring the cosmere together forever. Just like we promised."

I let him pull me close, his familiar scent of hellfire and cedar filling me. With the knuckle of his finger, he lifted my chin so that I looked into his stormy eyes.

Was he going to kiss me? Did I want him to? By Harmony, *yes*. In that moment, I realized I'd wanted this for the last six years, every time he'd appeared and (inevitably) upended my life.

"Nicelle..." he said, his voice low and breathy.

"Yes?" I rolled up onto my toes and leaned into him.

"I am so very sorry." He lifted the Compass of Spirits, inserted the aluminum key, and turned it. The little rings spun until they flowed with ethereal light, which inverted in on itself with a giant pop I felt in my soul more than heard with my ears.

I fell forward onto my knees, the Haunted Man's presence no longer there to hold me up, though the afterimage of him activating the device hung in the air for a moment until it puffed away like smoke from a burnt match.

He had done it. He'd finally entered the ghostly dimension.

And he'd done it without me.

He'd bloody *betrayed* me. Rusting *used* me.

I will spare you the ugly details of my following tantrum, though I did yell some of the delicious curses I'd learned in my time with him. At the end of my fit, my immaculate makeup was smeared, my hat and its raven feathers lay in tatters, and Tabaar and KeSun were suddenly there in their human forms.

"He's gone!" I shouted. "Along with the only way to finish the job, and now we're stuck a thousand miles from home in the space between continents!"

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"He's lucky I can't follow him." I clenched my fist around the metal knuckles until the edges bit into my palm.

The two Faceless Immortals shared a glance before KeSun nodded as if deciding something. Then Tabaar spoke.

"Actually," he said. "There is another way."

◆

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It's been two weeks since Nicelle's last letter. (You know how intermittent her correspondence can be.) I can only assume she succeeded in entering the ghostly realm and, Harmony willing, we'll soon know the end of her adventure.

— *Continued next week?* —

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Marasi led the others toward their target. It proved easy to sneak around underneath the train tracks; the buildings down here in this urban twilight were cramped, the streets narrow. Almost like the stories of the old Luthadel slums.

Crowded tenements were crammed up beside factories, refineries, and warehouses. All in the shadow of the tracks—a symbol of progress and unity upon which stormed past every few minutes a tooth-rattling reminder: Wasn’t it so nice to live in such a modern city? With a beacon of advancement like the high-speed rail? It cast such a progressive shadow.

She was all for progress in general, but far too often it seemed to stratify society rather than unite it. A high-speed rail was good, but could it be afforded by those who would most benefit? Nice apartments were great, but if they drove those who couldn’t live in them to darkness under the tracks, then that made some lives worse while making others better.

She’d been forced to confront this herself as she sought for reform. Good intentions had to be coupled with a realistic look at the effects of your actions. It was entirely too easy to make things worse while trying to make them better.

Is that why I’ve focused more on the detective side of my job over the years? she wondered. *I was going to change things. But the day-to-day work is so demanding, and the big problems are just so big …*

Thoughts for another time. The three of them crept ever closer to the tire factory, using the back alleys. TwinSoul made good on his promise, keeping up—though they didn’t have to move quickly, and there was always a wall for him to rest his hand against to keep his balance. Marasi still worried about bringing an octogenarian to what might soon be a battle zone, but bit her tongue on the matter.

As they drew close—only one street away—Moonlight halted the group. Marasi was curious what had prompted the stop, until she noticed a bulbous black motorcar with tinted windows pulling up to the factory.

The lord mayor of Bilming climbed out—accompanied by several tough-looking bodyguards. Entrone hurried through the bay doors, shouting at the few remaining trucks there and waving for them to get moving. Marasi was almost certain she heard the name “Dawnshot” among his shouts.

He soon vanished into the structure.

“Well,” Marasi whispered, “*he’s* agitated.”

“Probably doesn’t appreciate his home being burned down,” TwinSoul whispered.

Marasi nodded. “Come on. His arrival seems to confirm that we’ve found the right location.”

They took the long way around, briefly dipping out of the shade cast by the railway before diving back in, swimming through shadows until they reached the back wall of the factory. Here they slunk along until they found an old window, boarded up. Marasi had hoped to be able to peek through and find an empty room, but it was boarded up on the other side as well.

“Hmmm,” TwinSoul said, resting his aged, bony hand on the bricks. Crystals grew from his palm, creeping along the surface and between boards. “Yes, they really should have sealed this with pitch…”

“What do you see?” Moonlight whispered.

“I don’t see anything,” he said. “But Silajana? Well, he senses a small room cluttered with shelves and small objects. No one is inside, and the wall to the right of the window bears no shelving.”

He broke his hand free, leaving a crust of crystals on the wall—which began disintegrating, dropping to dust that in turn burned away into rose-colored mist. Moonlight dug in her rucksack—briefly exposing the glowing jars within—and took out something made of leather. Like a very large billfold, or a toolbelt, it unclipped to reveal three stone stamps.

She selected one, dampened it with some odd glowing red ink, then raised it. “Be ready to move,” she said, then pressed it to the wall. The stamp head, remarkably, *sank* half an inch or so into the brick. When Moonlight pulled it back—trailing red mist—it left a glowing red stamp imprinted into the wall, marked by intricate designs and patterns.

The wall then began to *shift.* The bricks groaned softly, then popped and ground as they pulled to the sides—suddenly fluid—and a door emerged in the wall. Like … like someone had *unzipped* the stones to reveal it underneath. In seconds the structure had rearranged—many bricks simply vanishing—to create a worn old wooden door with peeling yellow paint.

Moonlight yanked it open and gestured for them to enter. Marasi ducked in first, stepping over some buckets of paint that had been piled against the wall. TwinSoul followed, then finally Moonlight. They crowded into a small chamber, lit by a single red electric bulb. Why were there so many washbasins on the counter, and all of these jugs of liquid? Was this a storage room for cleaning supplies? That didn’t explain the red light bulb, which was so dim it barely did anything.

Behind them, the doorway vanished—as if being consumed by the bricks on the sides. “That is the most unnatural thing I’ve ever seen,” Marasi whispered.

“You literally have a friend who can fly,” Moonlight said.

“And?” Marasi said, unzipping her rifle from its case. TwinSoul threw off his coat, exposing his suit and yellow sash, then rested a hand on his sword. Marasi listened at the door, and was joined by Moonlight. When they heard nothing from the next room over, Marasi eased the door open and found a pitch-black chamber beyond.

They slipped through it, passing a strangely large number of what appeared to be chairs. Yes, in rows. What in the world? At the far reaches of the room, Marasi fumbled in the darkness, searching for a door. Her hands instead brushed what felt like a series of light switches.

Since the room was clearly empty, she flipped one of the light switches. However, it wasn’t the kind of light she’d been anticipating. A streak of illumination burst from one wall and shone onto the other, projecting a brilliant image.

An image of a crumbling city, with ash falling from the sky. Then the image started *moving*.

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Marasi stared at the moving image, depicting a city in full color—though those colors were mostly muted dark greys and blacks against the brilliant red sky. Ash drifted from above, sprinkling the smoldering ruins. A loud mechanical sound came from the room emitting the light.

“By the first aether,” TwinSoul said, stepping up beside her and resting his hand on the back of a nearby chair for support. “What is it? A window into the future?”

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Moonlight said from the far wall, nearest the image. She hesitantly lifted her hand into the stream of light—and displaced the image, leaving a shadow of her hand on the wall.

Fortunately, Marasi *had* experienced something like this once before. VenDell had shown them a way of projecting evanotype images onto a wall using light. Those had been static, and in black and white. But he’d said something then that had stuck with her: *Harmony implies that if we find this wondrous, it will really burn our metals when the images start moving.*

It appeared the Set had figured out that secret. And they’d found a way to create moving images of another place, using cameras? This room did have the feel of a small playhouse theater, only without the stage.

But … was this landscape of piling ash and broken cities the future, or the past? It resembled Elendel, by the architecture, but there was so much rubble she couldn’t tell for certain.

“Here, look at this,” Moonlight called from the far side of the room, where she’d opened another door.

TwinSoul and Marasi joined Moonlight in a room with a different kind of decor. An enormous table dominated it, with a tiny replica of a city on it. It was like the model that TwinSoul had created, but made out of painted wood and plaster—broken and ruined, the buildings fallen as if in some disaster.

It *was* Elendel; she could see that from the layout. So, not only had someone seen the future, they'd built a model of what was going to happen?

Moonlight peeked into some boxes, then pulled out a handful of fine ash from one, which she let trail through her fingers. Other shelves held tiny props—miniature versions of people lying like corpses. Dead horses made of painted plaster. Broken buildings, ruined motorcars, some large red-painted sheets with depictions of clouds and a blazing sun …

And evanotype cameras, set up to look across the table from down low. Seeing that, it all snapped together for her.

"It's a fake," she whispered with relief. "They didn't travel to the future or the past. They created a model of a fallen Elendel … then used these machines to craft pictures of a future that hasn't happened. Even that picture we found earlier … it's a fake. A photo of this model. They've been *deliberately* constructing a hoax to make people *think* the world is going to end."

"No," Moonlight said. "They've been constructing a hoax to make people think it has *already* ended. But who are they planning to show it to, and why?"

"If there are answers," Marasi said, "we'll find them below." She nodded the other direction, out through the theater room toward the larger doors on the wall near the projecting device.

They peeked out to find a hallway lit with caged industrial lights. The place felt eerily empty, considering the earlier activity. Moonlight went out first. Marasi joined her, and they found a set of doors at the end of the hallway. These doors had windows at the top, so they could observe the loading dock beyond.

A group of armed men and women patrolled here. TwinSoul crouched beside Marasi, then let a tiny—practically invisible—line of crystals sneak under the door.

“Ah,” he said. “You see that large wall that juts out to our left, just inside the room? That’s our industrial elevator as you had anticipated, my lady.”

Marasi could make out the section of wall he indicated—but the front of the elevator would be facing away from them. They’d never sneak through the open cargo bay without being spotted. Fortunately, they didn’t need to.

They moved through the hallway to the appropriate location—a blank wall, beyond which should be the elevator.

“All right,” Marasi whispered.

Moonlight created another door, then pulled it open, revealing a deep, dark shaft leading down. The elevator must be below, likely having carried the lord mayor and his bodyguards into the depths.

Now what?

“Allow me,” TwinSoul said, stepping through the door and steadying himself by grabbing a small box just inside, standing with one foot on a narrow ledge, the other dangling over the void. Marasi reached to steady him, but before she could the door vanished, the wall stretching back into place.

Moonlight hastily stamped again, then pulled open the door. They found TwinSoul hanging from a ladder constructed of roseite stone. He took a long drink from his backpack full of water and smiled. “Shall we?” he asked.

“What if someone calls the elevator back up?” Marasi asked.

“It’s an industrial elevator,” Moonlight said. “Look how wide this shaft is, how thick the cables are. It will move slowly. Worst case, we can climb on top and ride it up. There’s enough space above us here that we won’t be crushed.”

Marasi nodded, and TwinSoul began climbing down, new rungs forming beneath him as he did so. Marasi stepped onto the ladder, testing its strength. TwinSoul was, it turned out, *exceptionally* handy to have along. She climbed down a little to let Moonlight on too. The doorway vanished again, but Moonlight cracked open her rucksack to let some light leak out, painting the shaft with a pale white glow.

They started descending toward the caverns. And, hopefully, answers.

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Wax climbed down the hidden passage in the mayor’s mansion. Yes, it did seem to be squeezed between two walls; he’d climbed far enough to pass the first floor and reach the basement. Here his ladder emerged into a small room with iron walls and ceiling.

It had supplies on the shelves: dry rations, jugs of water. Looked like some kind of small emergency bunker. Not intended for long-term occupancy, but a safe bolt-hole in case of … what? Riots in the streets? Or something more nefarious, like an accidental weapon detonation?

Chilled, Wax inspected the room and found scrapes on the floor indicating a hidden door on one wall. He opened it without much difficulty—though it was made of thick reinforced metal—and found a path into the storm drain. Light peeked in through the grates above, and the scent—though unpleasant—wasn’t terrible. Not a true sewer, just a place for washing rainwater out of the streets and toward the ocean.

And a nice emergency exit from the mayor’s mansion, he thought, noting numerous footprints in the sludge and dried muddy ones in the concrete tunnel up ahead. A little farther along, he found a small motorized cart, open roofed, perfect to drive in these tight confines. The wheels were covered in sludge, and there were numerous tire tracks in the mud beyond.

There were no keys in the cart, and though supposedly there was a way to start one without them, that was a feat of thievery he’d never studied. Instead Wax pulled the folded-up calendar from his coat pocket and noted again the numerous appointments at the “lab.” Back and forth, sometimes a couple of times a day. If Wax had been visiting a secret installation that frequently, he would most certainly have wanted a covert way to travel.

Wax started into the tunnel on foot, but then phantoms from long ago rose around him. For the briefest moment, he wasn't in a drainage sewer in the most modern city of the Basin. He was in a dirty mine adit, haunted by twisted "artwork" made by a terrible mind. Golden light sifting down from above. A meeting with destiny.

Someone else moves us.

A deep breath and a moment of peace banished the phantoms. They'd be with him forever, but they didn't *haunt* him any longer. They were more like echoes than ghosts. Reminders of the man he'd been, the life he'd led, and the people he'd loved. They were remembered, but today he had work to do. He found a service ladder to the street above, and climbed up to go find Wayne. Hopefully he wasn't on fire.

Blessedly, he found Wayne alive and only slightly singed, waiting at the prearranged rally point. A bar, because of course it was. Wayne had picked the spot.

Wax slid into the seat beside his friend, and Wayne passed him a shot of whiskey, which Wax downed with a hiss of satisfaction. They left money on the counter, then slipped out the back.

"You find anythin'?" Wayne asked as they reached the end of the alley behind the bar.

"Some writings that might be relevant," Wax said. "Calendar. Letters. More importantly, a secret tunnel—hopefully leading somewhere useful."

"Nice," Wayne said.

"What happened to you?"

"Eh," Wayne said. "Nothin' that interesting."

Wax looked at him, then at the burn marks on his trousers.

"Couldn't do Grandma's Been at the Vodka," Wayne explained. "Couldn't find a wig in time. So I did Flaming Bunny instead."

"Flaming Bunny," Wax said flatly. "Please tell me you didn't set a rabbit on fire, Wayne."

"Of course not. I couldn't find a damn *wig* in time; where would I find a *rabbit*?"

“Good, I—”

“You use a cat for Flaming Bunny. And those are all over the dang place.”

“Wayne. You *set a cat on fire*?”

“Hell, no! What do you think I am? A sadist?”

Wax relaxed a little.

“You throw the cat out a window,” Wayne explained.

“Oh, Harmony…” Wax said. “*Why?*”

“To *save* it from the flames, of course!” Wayne shook his head as Wax led him toward the storm drain. “That’s the plan. You start a big fire, then go around screaming and throw a cat out the window. People believe you and think you’re saving pets.”

“Then…”

“Then you shout that someone has to save the bunny,” he said. “You lead everyone in to knock on the doors and get folks outta the place, and everybody gets all crazy and distracted helpin’ you.”

Wax stopped on the street, gawking at the Silver House with everyone else. It was now almost fully ablaze, a terrible plume of smoke rising from it, like the Deepness itself.

“You did say,” Wayne noted, “that following an egregious diplomatic incident, we might as well have some fun.”

“That is *not* what I said.” Wax sighed.

“What?” Wayne said. “You still on about that cat thing?”

“You really threw it out a window?”

“What would you have done? *Leave it to burn?* I hadda rescue the thing.”

“Rescue the cat. From a fire you made. A cat that you kidnapped *expressly for that purpose.*”

Wayne grinned. “Oh, don’t worry. I hucked him at a tree real good. Cats always land in trees, so long as you throw them hard enough.”

“Why … why would you think that?”

“Dunno,” Wayne said as Wax started them moving again. “Must have learned it in school.”

“Did you … go to school?”

“As a kid? Nah. But I burned one down once, before I even developed Flaming Bunny. Maybe the cat thing was on the board or something in there.”

“Wait. When did you burn down a *school*?”

“West’s Haven?” Wayne said. “Nine years back. It was an evil damn school.”

Wax hesitated at the mouth of the alley with the access ladder, thinking. West’s Haven …

Oh, right. That *had* been an evil damn school.

“Fine,” Wax said, pulling open the hatch to the storm drain. “Let’s keep moving.”

Wayne climbed down. At the bottom, he grunted.

“What?” Wax said, joining him.

“Don’t tell Marasi ’bout this,” he said. “I told her you ain’t never taken me into a sewer. Least this one doesn’t stink…” He squinted. “Actually, kinda looks like a narrow canyon, with all those lights coming in the top…”

“Why would you say that?” Wax said.

“No reason.”

They both turned around as the bells of the fire brigade sounded from above.

“So…” Wayne said. “Calendar and letters, was it?”

Wax nodded. “Gave has been visiting a place called the lab, though he also left for two weeks for some kind of trajectory test a couple months ago. Disguised as a vacation.”

“Huh,” Wayne said, pointing ahead. “And the lab is this way, you think?”

“Seems likely,” Wax said. He dug in his pocket a moment, then passed the calendar to Wayne.

Who whistled softly. “No appointments after today?”

“I noticed that too.”

“‘They arrive’…” Wayne said, reading.

Wax nodded, giving Wayne a moment with the calendar pages while he pulled out the letters. The light wasn’t great down here, but he could make out enough in the sunlight coming through the grates. Reading the two letters again, one extremely incriminating, the other full of pleasantries. What …

Oh, rusts. "Wayne," he said, holding up the incriminating letter they'd gotten from the newspaper editor. "This is a forgery."

"What? Really?" Wayne took it. "How do you know?"

"Before all this started," Wax said, "I spent a good amount of time on an operation that implicated Vennis Hasting—who supposedly wrote that letter—in a scandal. I proved that he had been bribing other senators. In order to make our case, Steris and I authenticated letters we'd acquired from him. Rusts. I visited three separate handwriting analysts, and they talked specifically about the distinctive turn of Vennis's strokes. Which aren't right in this one." He felt his eyes widen. "That's what it means … *that's* what she's doing…"

"Mate," Wayne said. "You've gotta be more clear. 'Cuz I sure ain't following."

"My sister," Wax explained. "She needs a way to seize control of the Basin, and prove to Autonomy she can rule here. I've been wondering how blowing up Elendel achieves that."

"It would remove a whole lot of barriers."

"Yes, but surely the other cities would never follow someone who committed such an atrocity." Wax held up the fake letter. "Unless Telsin could claim she *didn't* blow up Elendel. Unless she had proof—in the form of forged letters—that the *senators inside Elendel* were the ones developing the bomb. With the right evidence, she could make it look like they mistakenly blew themselves up."

"Oooh, that's devious," Wayne said. "She can 'recover' some of the details of that weapon too, so Bilming will 'reluctantly' have access to the technology to protect the Basin from the Malwish. Hell … that would work. Remove Elendel. Unite the Basin. Achieve dominance on the planet."

A piece locked into place. Even Gave's letters—the real ones from Vennis Hasting—made sense now. They'd needed handwriting samples, hence the cordial letters between mayor and senator.

"And the lack of appointments after today?" Wayne asked. "Seems like our deadline's even tighter than we feared."

“We need to find this lab,” Wax said, starting along the storm drain again. “And hope the bomb is there.”

Wayne nodded, joining him. Gave had scheduled fifteen minutes on either side of his appointments for travel to the lab—so it wouldn’t be too far.

As they walked, Wax found himself increasingly worried. About what Telsin was doing. About the implications of it all. So he was a little relieved when Wayne broke the silence.

“Sooooo…” Wayne said. “When you were in the mayor’s office … did you notice if he had a nice desk?”

“He had a rather nice one,” Wax said. “Why?”

“Did you…” He nodded back in the direction of the Silver House. “You know…”

“Fart in his chair?”

“Yup.”

“Wayne. Of *course* I didn’t.”

They walked a little farther through the muck, finding a place where kids had obviously snuck down, judging by the graffiti painted on the walls: giant sweeping Terris patterns of V’s.

“Okay,” Wax finally said, unable to let it go despite trying quite forcefully, “*why* would you even *think* that I would do that to his chair? You explicitly said not to, and beyond that … what the hell? Who does that?”

“Nobody, nobody,” Wayne said. “It’s good you didn’t. Gotta stay classy, you know. ’Specially in times like this. Very serious. Bombs threatening cities. Likely detonation today. No time for frivolity.”

He paused.

“But…” Wayne continued, “if *I*’d been there, and seen that fancy chair … Well, I like those chairs, you know? The type that leans all the way back, and is all leather, and firm enough for support, but not so firm that it’s uncomfortable. You know?

“And I’d think, ‘Damn, that’s a fancy chair.’ And I’d wonder … would the old backyard mistmaker sound different? What if I released a little concentrated essence of Wayne into those perfect leather contours? Would it feel different? Would my cheeks—”

“That’s enough. Please.”

“Oh, right. Okay.”

They continued on a little farther, but something about his words … Wax again tried to put it out of his mind, but …

“Wayne,” he finally said, closing his eyes, feeling angry at himself for continuing the conversation. “I have a chair *just like that* back in my study in the penthouse.”

“That you do,” Wayne said solemnly. “You do indeed.”

Oh hell. “Wayne. Did you—”

“Wax, the whole city is in danger, you know? You need to stop letting your attention drift, mate. First that fixation on me maybe setting government buildings on fire—only twice, mind you, which isn’t a pattern, just a coincidence. Now this fascination with what comes outta my backside. Can’t we keep focused on important things?”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“Like this art,” Wayne said, admiring some graffiti. “Ma was right. This place is beautiful.”

“Ma?” Wax said. “Do I *want* to know what you’re talking about this time?”

“This just reminds me of an old story with a canyon,” Wayne said, joining him as they continued. “A story my ma told me. Last one she gave me. So I remember it well, you know?”

“No,” Wax said. “How is this tunnel a canyon?”

“It just is,” Wayne said softly, looking up as they passed under another grate, sunlight crossing his face in a checkerboard pattern. “Been thinking about it since earlier today. It’s inevitable, you know?”

“I don’t,” Wax said. “I really don’t, Wayne.”

“Well it just is,” he said. “Even if you don’t know it. You’re the hero, Wax, and you got a mission. Barm. The nastiest monster what ever lived. You’re gonna stop him…” He hesitated. “Watch out. Might be some snakes in this canyon.”

“It’s a storm drain,” Wax said, “and I’ve never seen a snake in the city.”

“Yeah, they’re damn good at sneaking,” Wayne said. “Speaking of snakes: the Set, they’ll know that was us with the mansion.”

“Undoubtedly,” Wax said. “They might push into the mayor’s study to recover sensitive documents. I couldn’t replace the rug above the trapdoor—so they’ll know I found the tunnel.”

“Ah, great.”

“Great?”

“You’re supposed to find a bad guy in the canyon,” Wayne explained. “If the story is going to go right, at least.”

“Wayne,” Wax said. “We’re not in a canyon in your mother’s story. We’re in a storm drain in Bilming, trying to find and stop an explosive device. We—”

He was interrupted by a gunshot just ahead, echoing in the narrow tunnel—and a bullet hit the concrete near Wax’s head with a pop, blasting out a chip.

They both immediately ducked to the sides, getting low, and saw shadows moving in the tunnel ahead, just around a bend. Wax picked out two figures crouching beside the curve of the tunnel—the Coinshot he’d fought earlier, and a shorter woman wearing a bowler hat.

“Hey,” Wayne said. “Will you look at that. Bad guys *and* snakes. Both at the same time.”

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Marasi’s team neared the bottom of the elevator shaft without incident, carefully using TwinSoul’s roseite ladder. Red-pink dust crumbled around her as she slowed her climb, the little motes often evaporating in the air below her. Marasi probably had a dusting of them in her hair—smoldering there, like simmering ashes without the heat.

They found the large service elevator settled snug on the bottom of the shaft. TwinSoul expanded his ladder to the sides so all three of them could climb down beside one another. Then Marasi tested the roof of the elevator with her toe. Solid, sturdy metal. She lowered her weight onto it carefully, and it didn’t even bow. She nodded to the others, who joined her.

“Now what?” Moonlight whispered.

“Service hatch,” Marasi said, locating one set into the other corner. She eased it open. The front doors of the elevator were open, though she couldn’t see much more from this angle. She waved TwinSoul over. “Can you see if there is anyone watching below?”

A small line of roseite provided answers.

“Silajana sees two guards,” TwinSoul whispered. “A man and a woman, armed with rifles. They are opposite the open elevator door, near a natural stone wall. It appears that we have indeed arrived at a series of tunnels and caverns.

“The guards do not seem observant, and are currently looking at one another rather than the elevator. Should I try to send them to the aethers, their souls left to ruminate on their poor choices in this particular life?”

"She wants to remain quiet, TwinSoul," Moonlight said. "That might be overkill."

"I can handle this," Marasi whispered. "Though it would help if you could lower me through that hole a little, TwinSoul, so I can see."

He obliged, creating a small lattice of crystals to support her as she lowered her head into the elevator, her hair hanging down. The two guards stood amid some large crates, facing each other and leaning back against separate boxes. TwinSoul was right. They weren't paying attention. Actually, they appeared to be flirting. At least, the man was giggling at his own jokes, and the woman was pretending not to be impressed.

From her side pouch, Marasi took out one of her Allomantic grenades and then attached her fishing line. She charged the grenade, then waited—and patience rewarded her when the man said something that finally made the woman laugh. With them distracted Marasi threw her grenade, which activated immediately after touching down. The two guards—focused on one another—hopefully wouldn't notice that time around them had slowed.

"All right," Marasi whispered, holding the fishing line. "Let's go."

Marasi dropped into the elevator with a thump. Moonlight followed more stealthily, prowling forward as she landed. TwinSoul lowered majestically on a pole of roseite with a foothold. He stepped off, then stumbled and put his hand to the wall of the elevator, steadying himself.

The three of them checked the tunnel for any other guards—it was empty—and slipped out, careful not to touch the barely visible edge of the slowness bubble, which was shimmering like the air above hot pavement.

The two guards remained frozen there. The woman's eyes closed as she laughed, the man grinning and fixated on his companion. Hopefully he wouldn't catch blurs from the corner of his eye. Marasi and the others hid in a nearby cross tunnel. She yanked her grenade up and out using the fishing line, and the bubble collapsed.

She snatched the grenade from the air as the female guard's laugh echoed from amid the crates. Marasi waited, tense. Had they been seen? Had either of them heard the grenade hit the stone over the sound of laughter?

Their conversation continued as if nothing had happened. Marasi nodded in relief to the others, and they prowled a little farther down their current tunnel. It was lit by a series of miner's lights on a thick cord on the wall, creating alternating darker sections and brightly lit ones.

"That was well executed," Moonlight whispered as Marasi rewound the fishing line. "Only one way to go for now: down this tunnel?"

Marasi nodded.

"I feel exposed like this," TwinSoul whispered. "We could encounter more guards."

Marasi felt the same, but there was little they could do. They continued along the tunnel, which felt much like the ones she'd entered with Wayne the other day. Smooth, ancient rock—with some rubble here and there showing that chunks had fallen in from the ceiling during the explosive-weapon tests. And perhaps some of the blasts had been used not to test, but to connect tunnels and caverns.

Voices echoed from up ahead. Marasi glanced behind them at the long, exposed tunnel, then pointed forward, toward one of the darker sections where she thought she saw some larger chunks of rubble. TwinSoul lagged behind, despite his promise, as Marasi and Moonlight hurried into the shadows.

None of those speaking were visible yet, as the tunnel turned ahead. Marasi crouched behind some rubble, Moonlight joining her. The stone chunks only just came up past her knees when she crouched, but it was better than nothing. They waved anxiously to TwinSoul, who did his best, stumbling as he arrived and falling to his knees near them.

Then stone began to grow from his hand. It arced up around them, darker colored than his usual roseite. Though it was still pink, the shadows hid the color. He took a long drink from his backpack to restore his water, then—at his urging—they all crouched as low as they could go and let the roseite grow over them, leaving a small section clear at the front so they could see what was happening outside.

A group of patrolling soldiers wandered around the bend. There were only five of them, but Marasi was glad for the cover as they paused and chatted about the lord mayor's visit, then split up in opposite directions.

One patrol went back toward the elevator, right past their hiding place. They didn't even look down.

Still, Marasi's heart thundered in her chest until the tunnel fell silent again, and she risked a whisper. "You two certainly are handy."

"Thank you, my lady," TwinSoul said.

"This is only a fraction of the talents members of the Ghostbloods have," Moonlight noted. "You'll be amazed at the things we will show you."

"If I join," Marasi said. "I don't truly know what you are, what you do."

"Well, that is easy to explain," TwinSoul said. "We have three general tenets."

"Protect Scadrial," Moonlight said, standing up as the roseite shell began to disintegrate.

"But neither of you are from here," Marasi whispered.

"True," TwinSoul said, "but my homeland is inhospitable to my kind for now. I joined Lord Kelsier for the opportunity to gain allies and resources for my eventual fight against the dark aether. And having this planet remain safe and uncorrupted is a worthy goal on its own."

"And you?" Marasi asked Moonlight. "You can't go home either?"

"I can't," she said, "but I don't care so much about that. I'm keeping an eye on a particular enemy of the Ghostbloods. Plus I like secrets." She nodded forward.

They continued, and after they checked around the bend and made sure no one else was coming, Marasi whispered to Moonlight, "What are the other two tenets?"

"We share what we know with each other," Moonlight said. "There are no secrets within a team. If you ask Kelsier, even *he'll* tell you what *he's* planning. But you absolutely can't share secrets outside the organization without his permission."

"And the last one?"

"We trust each other," TwinSoul said. "We're a team. A family. You join us, you absolutely swear not to make a move against another Ghostblood. No infighting. No betrayals. No undermining one another. No squabbling over resources or favor."

“We take it very seriously, Marasi,” Moonlight said. “And the way you act—your attitude as part of a team—is one of the main reasons we came to you.”

And not, she implied, to Wax. They went on, Marasi chewing on those tenets. She swallowed the last one easily. Not moving against one another? Not undermining the mission or goals of another member of the group? That sounded wonderful. More than once, she’d collided with another constable’s ambition, preventing her from getting things done.

The other tenet though … Not sharing information with those outside? That sat in her gut like a stone. She was a constable for the city of Elendel. Joining the Ghostbloods would be like … like swearing allegiance to another country.

But the secrets they knew … the things they were doing … She doubted that if she joined the Ghostbloods, she’d *ever* have to waste her time dealing with small-time criminals again.

She put it all out of her mind for the time being as they reached an intersection. The rightmost turn was particularly well-lit. There, two long, narrow structures had been built out along the tunnel, one on each side. The path continued between them, as if they were shops on a street.

Peeking around the corner into this tunnel, Marasi could see that one of the two buildings was guarded by thick-armed men. The lord mayor’s bodyguards. The two men were distracted though, talking to someone inside. Which gave Marasi an opportunity.

She led the way, crouching low around the corner, and crossed the short distance to the rightmost building. She was joined by the other two as the bodyguards finished their conversation and closed the door, settling into guard postures.

A window on this short end of the building, where Marasi and the others hid, gave her a chance to steal a look. And there he was, right inside. The lord mayor himself, in formal dining wear, hair slicked back with something greasy, sitting at a table. Aside from him, there were two additional guards settling in by the door. Four people in white lab coats huddled near Gave’s table, one handing him something to drink.

Marasi frowned, noticing Gave's slumped-over posture. He looked … worn. Far less commanding or smug than he was at the police station.

He shook his head. "What odds do you give her," he asked, his voice muffled from inside, but audible, "of getting that bomb to fly. Of actually salvaging this?"

"That's … not my department, sir," one of the scientists said. "I'm not an engineer."

"I can't believe it's come to this," Gave said, his voice softening. "I didn't think … when I agreed … Are they here?"

"Nearly," another scientist said.

"How many?" Gave asked.

"A lot," the woman replied. "An army of soldiers with golden skin and glowing red eyes. Sir, is it true? Are they…"

Gave pounded the table. "*I'm* supposed to be in control! She's supposed to fail, and *I'm* supposed to take her place."

"You will, sir," one of the scientists said. "If she doesn't get the bomb working, Autonomy will kill her."

"And invade the whole *rusting* Basin," Gave said, hands to his face. "Maybe the world. Damn. It wasn't supposed to be like this…" He downed his shot and hauled himself to his feet.

Marasi shared a glance with the others. They'd known Autonomy was planning some sort of decisive attack if Telsin failed to prove she could control the Basin. It seemed that maybe Gave had been assigned to facilitate that?

It would be convenient for him, she thought, *to have these caverns as a bunker in case a destructive war breaks out above. That would explain the food, too.*

And some kind of invading army? She remembered how awed Miles Hundredlives had been, speaking of the "men of gold and red" as he died. Rusts.

"How many soldiers of our own do we have left in the bunker?" Entrone asked.

"Two contingents," said a scientist who seemed to be in charge—a thick-bodied woman in a white lab coat.

“And Metalblessed?” Entrone asked.

“None,” the woman said.

“That woman,” Entrone said, “is deliberately trying to leave me short-manned.” He started pacing. “While I’m *forced* to support her, lest the worst option play out. I can’t believe I let it get this far. We need some kind of military presence to corral those alien soldiers.”

“Can we do that?” the scientist asked.

“I don’t know,” he said, putting his hand to his head. “I don’t want to rule ashes. Rusts, Edwarn’s plans were always superior. We should have been pushing for those, instead of Telsin’s idiotic bomb.”

“Yes, my lord mayor,” Labcoat said. “Speaking of Edwarn’s plans, did you … want to proceed with the test?”

He waved for her to do so, and Labcoat sent her two assistants to the far side of the room, the stone wall of the tunnel. Marasi had missed a thick door set into the rock—made of strong wood, with sturdy locks on the outside.

The assistants undid these, opening the door to reveal a group of some twenty people huddled in the darkness. They wore an assortment of different kinds of clothing—some expensive, others just common work clothes. All were grungy and rumpled. With pistols drawn, the assistants picked out a lean woman in a torn evening dress, her face streaked with makeup. She barely resisted, looking too exhausted for anything more than a token protest.

The door was locked again, and the assistants strapped her facedown to a table. Then one took out a silvery spike, long and thin. Marasi felt a chill, then nausea. Was this …

Oh, Ruin. Were they making an Allomancer? She’d read about the process in the book Death had given her, but she’d never wanted to see it in person.

Labcoat took out a notebook. “We believe that we’ve isolated the technique Edwarn was on to,” she said. “Indeed, we’ve refined it. The process involves a very thin spike, my lord mayor, and, oddly, the right mindset.”

“Mindset?” he asked.

"You need to know what you're doing and why," the woman explained. "It helps to whisper a Command as you work, though we find it isn't strictly necessary. Trauma on the part of the subject is helpful as well."

At a nod from her, the assistants threaded the long spike through the skin of the woman's upper back. Almost like they were sewing with a six-inch needle. The poor woman made a pained whimper, and the assistant doing the procedure mumbled something to himself, then pushed the needle slowly back through her skin, as if making two holes for some kind of piercing. The woman screamed louder as the process finished.

As soon as the spike left her skin, the holes started bleeding. The woman fell silent, and the assistant washed off the bloodied spike and handed it to Labcoat, who promptly placed it in a solution attached to a device and examined it.

"Roughly five percent Invested," she reported to Entrone. "And as you can see, the subject is still alive. We've essentially excised a piece of the soul and stored it in the metal."

Wait.

They'd made a spike without killing the woman?

That was supposed to be impossible. Granted, Marasi hadn't studied Death's book in as much detail as Wax had, but she was fairly sure Hemalurgy always killed its subject.

"So?" Entrone said. "I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't particularly care if these people live or die. Creating spikes without killing them is pointless. We need Metalborn in huge numbers. *That* will impress Autonomy. *That* will make her realize this planet is a resource, not something to be burned."

"Ah, my lord," the woman said. "This woman *isn't* Metalborn. We've Invested a spike—a tiny bit, granted—using an *ordinary person.* All people are Invested by Ruin and Preservation as part of our very makeup—and we have a little extra Preservation, blessed by the Shards upon our creation. We're pulling some of that out.

"The percentage you get depends on the person. We think it might have to do with how likely they were, genetically, to be Metalborn. But they don't need that extra if the powers didn't manifest in them. It's vestigial. We simply slice it off and use it in a spike. Fully Investing one takes between twenty and thirty people.”

“But can you make *Allomancers* from those spikes,” Entrone said. “That’s the key part.”

The scientist glanced at the others. “Sir, this is a fantastic result. A huge step forward in—”

“Can you make me Allomancers?” he demanded. “Now. Today. To show Autonomy.”

“No,” Labcoat admitted. “We think we need to code this in some way to give a specific Metallic Art blessing. We’re working on that. We’ve had some few gain a power for a short time using one of these spikes, but it gives out soon after.”

“Damn,” Entrone muttered. “That means Edwarn’s Community project here is still valuable.” He folded his arms, looking worn down again. “But we have nothing to show Autonomy at the present. I’m going to have to do it. I’m going to have to let her army through. Call all of our remaining loyalists—those not working directly for Telsin—into the caverns.”

“But—” Labcoat began.

“We wait,” he said, “for Telsin to initiate her plan. We give her every opportunity. And then … then if it doesn’t work…”

“We survive,” Labcoat said.

“We survive.” He nodded to himself. “I’m going to the Community to see to the perpendicularity.” He waved toward the cell at the rear of the room. “They have all heard and seen too much. They are a liability. Execute them.”

“Of course, my lord,” Labcoat said. Entrone left, leaving the two guards inside, but collecting the two in the tunnel. He slammed the door, making the flimsy structure shake. Fortunately, once outside, he turned and continued farther into the complex instead of walking past Marasi and her team.

“Fetch me some invel gas pellets,” Labcoat said to the assistants in the room. “That will be a painless end for the captives. Fion, tell our loyalists to retreat to the caverns. They can bring their families, but nothing else. A priority-one evacuation order. This is the real thing.”

One of the assistants left at a dead run, also going farther into the complex. The other began fiddling in cabinets at the side of the room. Marasi and the two Ghostbloods crouched in the shadows, whispering.

"We have to get this information to Kelsier," Moonlight said. "A new way of making spikes could change everything."

"It's still brutal," Marasi whispered back. "Stealing a piece of someone's soul? It's better than murdering them, but I doubt this is something we could use in good conscience."

"You don't understand," Moonlight said. "If they're even *close* to forging Metalborn out of the raw power of souls—if they've had tests that resulted in an Allomancer, no matter how fleeting … Marasi, that path could lead to creating spikes using *pure* Investiture instead of souls." She tapped her rucksack, indicating the glowing jars inside.

Ruin. The ability to create spikes in a mechanical way? Even the process of making medallions among the Malwish required Metalborn. If what Moonlight implied was right, then it would change *everything.*

"For now," TwinSoul said, "Silajana reminds us that the planet itself is in danger. Getting information to Lord Kelsier is meaningless if that invasion happens. We must follow Entrone and see if we can interfere with Autonomy's plans."

Marasi peeked around the corner, looking farther down the tunnel. They could sneak past. But the people in that room were about to be executed …

"We have to help the prisoners," Marasi said.

"A few lives are meaningless right now," Moonlight said. "We need to keep moving. It's our way."

"It's not mine," Marasi said. "I'm an officer of the law. I can't leave a group of people to be murdered. Besides, he said they'd heard too much. They know something of use to us."

Moonlight and TwinSoul glanced to one another.

"I'm going to help them," Marasi said. "There are only two guards. We should be able to stop those with ease."

"If anything goes wrong," Moonlight said, "it could alert everyone down here. One gunshot…"

Marasi hesitated, weighing the risks. It might be foolish, she acknowledged, but she hadn’t become a constable to leave people to be murdered. She stood up straight. “It is a risk I will take. Are you with me, or do I do it alone?”

The other two stood. “Let’s do it quickly then,” Moonlight said.

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Steris had heard that in a fire, the rats were often the first creatures out. They could smell the smoke before the flames raged out of control—and so, on occasion, you could get an early warning of impending danger by watching the rats flee.

That was what she did now, while organizing her thoughts and listening to the other senators prepare their escape routes. She watched Lady Gardre, the woman Steris was almost certain was a member of the Set. So long as Gardre remained in the city, they had time.

But as the minutes stretched long, waiting for TenSoon to return with the Bands, she began to doubt. Perhaps it wasn’t Gardre. Perhaps one of the aides was the real agent, and they’d already fled. Perhaps the Set didn’t actually have anyone in the government’s inner circle. Perhaps—

An aide bustled into the room—and stepped over to Lady Gardre, whispering in her ear.

“Ah,” Gardre said. “I’ll need to deal with this.” Gardre stood up, straightening her jacket. “I’ll be back shortly.”

Steris knew she wouldn’t be. Her departure meant the city was in imminent danger. She passed TenSoon on her way out, and he drew the attention of the others. They didn’t realize.

“Now,” Adawathwyn said, striding around the table to TenSoon, “let’s see how these work. Give me the Bands. Let me walk Harmony’s Path and save the city! I am Metalborn, a Ferring of the mind. Whatever bomb is being delivered here, I can Push it away with the force of a planet! Or I can soar to Bilming and bring justice to those miscreants!”

Ambassador Daal stepped forward, his face hidden behind his mask. “This must be a negotiation. You promised that they wouldn’t be used.”

“Surely you can see the need, Ambassador,” Steris said. “You don’t expect us to simply *die* if this could save us?”

“Surely you Northerners understand the meaning of the word ‘promise,’” he said, looking at her through the holes in his mask. “I have the authority to negotiate for their return to us.” He leaned forward, his hands on the table, and looked straight at the governor—who leaned away, his eyes widening.

“If you use them,” Daal continued, “then I demand that they must be turned over to us next, for use during the disaster of *our* choosing. A compromise, yah? If you wish to avoid war, but also use these Bands, that is the *only* solution. You get this chance. We will also get a chance. Deal?”

All eyes in the room went to TenSoon. The kandra had validated the treaty and had become keepers of the relic. It appeared the others thought he could agree to this, and Steris supposed he was as close to an arbiter as they had.

“Harmony is preoccupied,” TenSoon said, “but our time is tight. So I will agree to this if the humans do. The Basin may use the Bands right now. But they revert to the Malwish.”

“Do it,” the governor said. “If it could save the city … I agree.”

It was not the best situation for a negotiation, and Steris wondered how badly they were being played. Daal must see this as the perfect opportunity to get what he wanted. Regardless, she still didn’t understand why TenSoon thought this might work. Yes, the Bands made a person a powerful Metalborn, but Daal acted as if they could win wars on their own—and TenSoon had this distant expression. He met her eyes.

“What?” she asked.

“We believe,” he whispered, “there is a way to transport objects large distances using a conflux of Metalborn powers. It is a thing Harmony doesn’t yet understand himself. But I wonder … if someone feeling the transcendent power of the Bands … could solve the puzzle.”

Fascinating. She took notes.

TenSoon opened the box to present the Bands—which were in the shape of a large spearhead, made of multiple bands of different kinds of metal. The governor nodded for Adawathwyn to take them. She reached in and touched them, her eyes alight. She picked them up, held them for a moment, and frowned.

“How…” she said. “How do I activate them?”

“It was natural for Wax,” Steris said, walking over. She hesitantly poked the Bands, and felt nothing.

They passed them around, letting everyone try. Finally TenSoon took them, his face scrunched up in thought. Then horror followed. “They’re *drained,*” he whispered. “Something has happened … How…?”

Without their power, the Bands of Mourning were essentially just a heavy piece of history. Like a statue’s broken arm.

The governor gave a groan of despair and leaned back in his chair, squeezing his eyes shut. Salvation had just flitted away on butterfly wings. Steris couldn’t help wondering what she was missing. She’d never anticipated this. The Bands could be drained? By whom? And how?

Daal stepped forward and touched them with one finger. “It’s true,” he muttered. “What have you done? Have you been using these in secret?”

“What?” Adawathwyn said. “No! We haven’t seen them in years, not since the treaty!”

Daal picked up the Bands in one hand. “I will return them to my people.”

“Wait,” Steris said, standing. “That wasn’t the deal.”

“Wasn’t it?” he said. “You had your chance to use them. It happens they are useless to you. Now we must have our chance. I wonder if it is *piety* that makes them work, yah? Or if maybe I am right, and you’ve been using them all along. Our scholars will know if you are trying to pass off some fake.”

Steris looked at him and had the distinct impression that was … a prepared speech? Yes. She prepared words to say even in common conversations. His mannerisms felt practiced, rehearsed. But surely she was wrong. He couldn’t have been *prepared* for this?

Unless he'd known the Bands would be drained. Unless he'd come to Elendel looking for a crisis that would make them call on the Bands, so he could offer his deal. And then …

"I don't know if I can allow this," the governor said.

"I don't know that we can forbid it," TenSoon growled back. "You agreed."

"Ah," Daal said. "Perhaps your Faceless Immortals can actually be impartial? Curious. I had not believed it."

Daal took the Bands' case from TenSoon, who growled low and dangerous—but let it go.

Steris watched with an odd feeling of disconnect. This was … this was some kind of Malwish ploy, completely *separate* from the tensions at Bilming. Which made it a problem for another time, when they weren't being threatened with extinction. The Bands were not the solution today. But there was a secret here that eventually she would like to tease out.

The ambassador walked to the door, but paused there, the Bands under his arm. "I did promise you passage, Governor. If this city *is* doomed, as you all think, then … if you wish, any of you may join me now. I will drop you at a safer location."

"I'll go," Adawathwyn said immediately. She snatched her things off the table.

"Maybe…" the governor said. "Maybe we're wrong. Mistaken somehow about this danger…"

"Are you a betting man, my lord governor?" Reddi asked. "Because I am. And I've learned to never bet against one particular man. If Dawnshot says a bomb is pointed at us, it is."

"We need to evacuate the city." Steris thumped her notebooks. "I have the plans here. Full citywide emergency plans for various categories of disaster. I had free time a few summers ago and was bored."

"This is what you do for fun?" Reddi asked.

"Well, the house taxes were already done for the next year," Steris said. "Here. This plan is the best for this situation. It gets the most people out of the city the fastest. The longer we have, the more we save. It's one of my most efficient creations.” She looked up to the governor. “Please. We can’t leave. We have to protect the city.”

“Are you coming or not?” Daal snapped from the doorway. Perhaps he wanted the honor—and political bargaining chip—of having saved the governor.

Governor Varlance glanced from him to Steris. Then toward Adawathwyn—whose robes flashed as she vanished out the door. The other senators hastened to follow.

“You,” Steris said softly to the governor, “are the captain of this city. This entire nation. You were chosen by the people to represent them. I need your authority to save as many of them as possible. There will be time for you to escape later. For now, help me save this city.”

“You … really have a plan?” the governor said. He wiped his brow. “An evacuation plan?”

“Yes. We can do this, Varlance.”

He nodded. A quick, hesitant nod, frightened. “I want to try. Where do we start?”

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There wasn’t no cover in this canyon, so Wayne had to do the smart thing: turn into some.

He stepped in front of Wax, who was ducking backward around the corner. Too slow, but fortunately the next shots from the enemy hit Wayne, making him grunt. Bullets *really* hurt. He supposed that was the point, but some other wounds were so big that your body kinda freaked out and decided not to hurt, least at first. Like it was saying, “Whoa. This is gonna suck *hard*. Better take a deep breath.”

Bullets though, they didn’t send him into shock or anything. So they just hurt. Like Death’s own eyes.

Still, it kept Wax from bein’ hit. Together he and Wayne ducked back around the curve in the tunnel, out of sight. The two of them waited there, Wax with guns out, ready to fire. They were perhaps thirty yards from where they’d spotted the two doppel-dummies, blocking the way farther through the tunnel.

Wayne rolled his shoulder as the bullet wounds healed, draining his metalminds a little further. He was using up his reserves pretty fast these last few days. Fortunately, most of his work with Marasi hadn’t required much healin’. Her missions didn’t *usually* involve things like throwing Wayne out windows like he was a rustin’ cat.

“Oi!” the not-Wayne called from farther down the tunnel. “We can’t shoot you if you keep hidin’! Come out so we can get on with killing you, mates!”

Oh, now that was plain *awful*. She was trying too hard—that wasn't a Roughs accent at all. It was inner-city Roughs enclave accent, with a bit of upper-crust theater thrown in—probably from her dialect coach. The resulting accent was ridiculous, just close enough to his natural accent that it was like rusty old spikes being pulled across a chalkboard.

"What the hell is going *on* with those two?" Wayne whispered.

"I suspect," Wax replied, "that the Set realized they'd need to face us, considering the ruin we made of their plans a few years back. So they spiked a few of their members with powers to match ours and trained them to fight us."

"That one isn't just tryin' to fight me," Wayne said. "She's tryin' to *be* me. You get the same sense from yours?"

"No," Wax said. "Other than the suit, he merely seems to be a competent Coinshot with a few extra spikes. Watch him, Wayne. He can burn up all of his steel in a single terrible burst, supercharging his Push to extreme levels. But he can also drain your abilities if he gets hold of you."

"So long as he has metals," Wayne said.

"The Set has some powerful resources, Wayne," Wax said. "I'll bet his chromium outlasts your bendalloy."

"We'll see about that." Wayne narrowed his eyes, peering around the corner. "That one what thinks she's like me, she's doin' a terrible job. I'm not nearly that annoying."

Wax calmly loaded a few bullets into his pistol.

"Hey," Wayne said. "Don't you say it."

"I didn't say a thing." He snapped the revolver closed. "Unfortunately, any delay is to their advantage. Which means we're going to have to go on the offensive."

"Close confines down here, mate," Wayne said. "Not great for Steelpushing. Real easy to get stuck in slow time while they coordinate to trap us."

"See if you can catch all four of us inside a speed bubble together," Wax said. "It's close confines, yes—but for them too."

"They can make their own bubble, mate," Wayne said. "Even inside ours. But I suppose they can't sculpt one like I can. So we should be good, if we’re in close together.”

“Exactly,” Wax said. “If neither of us can rely on speed bubbles or flying high with Steelpushes, maybe our trained skill will overwhelm their borrowed abilities. We can try to throw that Steelpusher out of the bubble, to freeze him. Just don’t let him touch you, or he can Leech your powers.”

A good enough plan, Wayne supposed. He dug in his pocket for the aluminum-lined pouch his accountants had given him and pulled out a few beads of bendalloy. Kept it in little marbles, easy to swallow.

He knocked them back. Wax nodded, and Wayne made as big a speed bubble as he could. They ran through it, broke out the other side, and dashed down the tunnel. It was a big concrete pipe thing, a good ten feet or more across, the bottom containing a foot-or-two-wide section of sludge that had partially dried, on account of the lack of rain recently.

The evil twins got a chance to deliberate in a speed bubble while Wayne and Wax moved. But they couldn’t do *too* much from inside one. Other than position themselves really well for when the bubble ended. So, the moment Wayne saw motion ahead, he dropped and rolled in the mud. So did Wax.

Bullets went streaking over their heads, where they’d been moments before. Wayne dashed the last few yards to close in on them, then tossed up a large speed bubble—fifteen feet across—to catch all four people. Dueling canes out, he went straight for the evil him, feigning a strike, dodging right, then sweeping with a cane from the left to knock her in the noggin. She barely managed to block him, then slid her weapon along his in a classic maneuver to try and smack his fingers.

He shoved her back and went in again, and the next sequence of attacks hit like a drumbeat—wooden stick against wooden stick. He got a hit on her, but she barely flinched as her metalminds healed her. She returned the blow, and he took it without much more than a faint grunt. Though his ribs cracked, they healed right up.

“Oi!” she said in that exaggerated parody of his accent. “That’s cheatin’!”

“You ain’t me,” Wayne growled. “Don’t pretend you are.”

She grinned and slid in the mud in an admittedly skillful move, getting past him and dodging his next swing—all while rapping him on the arm hard enough to break the bone. He grimaced and flipped his hand to the side to reset the bone as his muscles pulled it back into place.

He fended off her next attack with one arm while the other healed, letting her force him to retreat. At that moment, Wax flew between them and slammed into the tunnel wall with a grunt. He tossed a handful of bullets in the air, then ducked—tricking not-Wax into Pushing on them instead of him. Wax then slid back across the ground underneath and unloaded his guns toward the Coinshot.

Wayne and the not-him watched it all with shocked hesitation, then Wayne grabbed his second dueling cane out of the mud. The two scrambled back together and exchanged a few more blows.

"Hate doin' this sober," not-him said. "Maybe we should grab a pint, then have at this again in a right proper state of mind."

"Nah," Wayne said, "I drink with bastards, liars, and fools. But I draw the line at someone like me."

"I'm doin' well, then?" she asked as they locked canes, coming in close together. "I'm you?"

"You're something far, far worse," he muttered. "You're someone who *wants* to be me."

"Ha!" she said, breaking the lock and shoving him to the side, making him slide up against the shimmering edge of the speed bubble. It didn't move when Wayne did. They anchored in place, so it wouldn't fall unless he dropped it or was shoved out.

He shook his arms. Damn, she was strong. Looked like natural strength training, which he didn't have time to do. She came at him with a body check, making him grunt as she pressed up against him.

"Hope old Dumad is doing all right," she said, nodding at her companion. "I done stole some of his metal vials without telling him."

"I don't steal," Wayne muttered.

"Sorry! I borrowed it."

"I don't borrow neither! And your accent is sliding from Roughs street into southern Elendel street gang! Gah! You're gettin' it *all wrong*!"

"I love that you're more worried about me imitating you poorly than you are about me tryin' to kill you," she said, shoving her face up next to his. She stabbed him in the chest—he hadn't even seen her drop the dueling cane—with a glass knife. "It's so *you*, Wayne!"

"You don't know me," Wayne growled, managing to kick her leg and make her slip a little. She loosened her grip, which let him rip free and move around her, though her knife sliced him across the chest.

Rusts. He could heal that with the health in his bracer—which these days he wore embedded into the flesh of his thigh. But he was worried about how much she was making him use. That was probably the point.

"Oh, Wayne," she said, turning toward him. "I *do* know you. I've studied you for years! Freewheeling Wayne! Always ready with a joke. Snatchin' what he sees, chasin' the girls. Livin' his life without consequences. Just here for the fun and the booze!"

"Yeah?" he muttered. "And the pain?"

"Eh," she said with a shrug. "You get used to gettin' exploded, now don'tcha."

"Not that pain," he whispered.

They met again, but she was just plain better at the fightin' part than he was. Oh, Wayne was fine with the canes. But he lived his life. And in doin' so, he'd let the trainin' slack off—having a little gum chew out behind the building instead of working into the evening. With Marasi, he hadn't spent quite so much time getting his head knocked in.

But this creature, well, she'd been trainin' something hard. Focused entirely on this day, this meeting, this *fight.* He wasn't brawlin' with some bully off the street, or even some talented Set Metalborn. He was facin' an assassin what had been designed *specifically* to kill him.

She was stronger than he was. Faster than he was. Younger than he was. Better with the canes. He was better with his powers. He was certain of that. But in these close confines, that didn't really matter. And as he traded blows with her, taking hits and forcing himself to heal, he … Well, he took more punishment than he gave. Rusts … was this what Wax felt like, now he was gettin' on in years?

He rolled to the side, through the muck on the bottom of the giant tube they was in. That put him right to the other edge of the speed bubble, and he slipped halfway out of it—though fortunately, so long as you were touching it at all it included you in its powers.

A motion from where Wax was fightin' made Wayne duck. Wax himself went flying past again, and he soared completely out of the speed bubble. Damn. That was what they'd been planning to do to the other guy.

Wax froze instantly, hanging in the air with a grimace on his face, gun trailing from his fingers and hovering in front of him, mistcoat tassels sweeping around him.

Uh-oh, Wayne thought.

A spray of coins hit Wayne a second later.

"Aw, Dumad," not-Wayne said, turning. "I was havin' fun. *I'm* supposed to be the one who takes him."

"You're inefficient, Getruda," Dumad said. "You play with him. You simply need to hit him repeatedly until his health runs out." He punctuated this by giving Wayne another faceful of coins, knocking him to the ground.

Rusts. This was bad. Wayne healed that, but it was slow—his healing was starting to run dangerously low. And he had to ration it as a result.

"Oi," he muttered, "Death. Betcha fifty clips I survive this." It was a good time for a bet. Because in such a situation, Wayne had to try something truly desperate.

The truth.

He stumbled to his feet, putting his back to the rounded wall of the tunnel. "You think you know me?" Wayne whispered. "You think you know what I've been through?"

Dumad looked at him, then *Pushed.* And rusts, the guy was so strong he could affect the metal *inside* Wayne's body. That was a crazy thing to experience—Wayne was shoved backward from the coins embedded within him. Rust and Ruin … that was a power that the Ascendant Warrior was said to have had.

These guys really *were* cheating. No wonder Wax had lost his fight. No wonder Wayne had essentially lost his—the dueling portion at least. But if he could keep their attention …

He grunted at the Push. Then he stepped forward anyway, feeling the coins tear and rip inside him. He took another step, leaning forward into the

Push.

Not-him hesitated, lowering her canes. He met her eyes.

Then he grinned.

"You can't hurt me," he whispered, changing his accent. "Ain't nothin' that can hurt me more than life already has. You can't kill me. I'm already dead. I been dead for years, sister."

He took another step forward. Most people, they didn't notice accent changes like that. Little tweaks to the tone of your words. But people judged you on them anyway. Their brains associated accents with meaning.

Dumad frowned, seeming disturbed, and raised his hand and Pushed harder. Wayne slid in the mud, the coins ripping farther through him. Then he took another step forward and changed his accent further. Put on his most wide-eyed, excited face. Twisting his voice to be something unnatural. Something terrifying. Something out of a nightmare. Matching this not-Wax's accent, but terrible.

Like the accent he'd hear from his parents and family. Only broken. Wayne didn't need a hat for this one.

"It's easy to do what you do, since you don't care," Wayne growled to the two, making his eyes go even wider. "So long as you can pretend. But real pain, that comes when you realize what you are. What you done. Waking up each morning, knowin' you're worthless. *That's* pain. Anything else? Anything *you* could do to me? Well, that's just a little bit o' fun."

"You're…" Dumad trailed off as Wayne's smile widened.

"Thank you," Wayne said, "for tossin' Wax outta here. That way I got a few moments to have you two all to myself."

The coins finally ripped through Wayne's back, letting him lurch forward in a sudden rush. And as he did, he threw himself to the ground. Because amid his display—getting them to focus only on him—he'd dropped the speed bubble. And they hadn't noticed.

From the side, Wax put a hazekiller round straight in not-Wayne's face. Its secondary explosion went off a second later, blowing off half her skull. A second shot from Wax took Dumad in the chest as he was turning, then exploded out his back.

Incredibly, the Coinshot didn’t fall. Pewter. Did the fellow have *pewter* to burn and push through wounds? How many spikes did this fellow have, and why hadn’t they let Harmony take control of him?

Unfortunately, the man stayed on his feet and ducked the next bullets. He shoved a grate off the ceiling, opening it up to the sunlight, then seized the bloodied not-Wayne and Pushed on a coin.

The two launched up and out. One with a hole in his chest that didn’t seem to hurt as much as it should have, the other with half her head gone. She might be dead, though Wayne couldn’t be certain. Head shots were tricky. They could end you, but it all depended on the damage done.

Wax maybe should have put another few shots in them as they fled, but the man looked pretty ragged from the fight. Breathing deeply, he slumped back against the wall of the tunnel. They’d come close to losing this fight. Real close.

Wayne stumbled to his feet, aching all over, and used his healing to seal those coin wounds. But they remained sore. He was forced to stop healing to save the last bit of juice in his metalmind. Rusts.

Wayne turned and lurched over to Wax, his clothes a bloody, muddy mess. Wax’s, impossibly, were pretty nice—barely marked by the gunk on the floor.

“Hey!” Wayne said. “How the hell aren’t you covered in mud? I saw you roll through it.”

“I Pushed off a bullet when I did,” he said. He put a hand to his shoulder and groaned softly. “Nice job, with the distraction.” He met Wayne’s eyes. “Did you mean any of that?”

“Nah, of course not,” Wayne said, looking away. Ruin, he felt exhausted. And creaky. Like a floor what had been walked on so much, all the boards wobbled.

“Wayne…”

“Not the time, mate.” He settled down on the floor. “Rusts, I feel old. I’m not supposed to feel old. I’m the spry one!”

Wax settled down next to him on a dry part of the concrete. “You’re thirty-nine, Wayne. It catches up to you.”

“You infected me, you did,” Wayne grumbled. “I never felt old when I was workin’ with Marasi!”

“I infected you,” Wax said, “with *being old*?”

“Damn right.”

“That’s ludicrous even for you.”

“No it ain’t. You done started to think yourself old, and it drilled into my head too.” Wayne tapped at his skull. “Ideas is infectious, Wax. More than diseases.”

They caught their breath for a few more moments. Unfortunately, they couldn’t linger.

“They know for sure we found this tunnel,” Wayne said. “If there’s some kind of lab at the end of it, they’ll be clearing it out as we speak.”

Wax nodded and heaved himself back to his feet. He reached out a hand to help Wayne up.

“We need to talk,” Wax said. “About you. The way you’ve been feeling lately.”

“Sure. Okay. I like talkin’. But later.”

Later was *always* better.

Together, they pressed forward. “I got the woman pretty good,” Wax said. “Do you think that killed her?”

“Depends. How’s your luck been lately?”

“Awful,” Wax admitted. “But at least we know we’re on the right trail. Otherwise they wouldn’t have tried so hard to stop us.”

“Yeah, sure,” Wayne said. “I’m glad we’re done with the canyon, but the hardest part is yet to come. The mesa, which is gonna gobble you up. Remember to choke it from the inside.”

“I’ll do my best.”

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Marasi drew up a quick plan—which was the only kind they could afford. Moonlight and TwinSoul stayed near the window, ready to break in. Marasi worked her way up to the front of the building to place a grenade by the door. The slowness bubble would work through the wall, trapping the two guards who stood inside. As she charged her weapon, however, Moonlight ducked around the side of the rectangular structure and scuttled up to Marasi.

"Guards just moved," she hissed. "They're getting gas masks from a bin near the scientists."

Rusts. She couldn't let them release the gas.

"We go in now," Marasi hissed. "Back me up if the grenade fails."

Moonlight nodded, and Marasi kicked in the door and hurled her grenade toward the group of people in the left corner, near the window where she and the others had been spying.

Sorry, TwinSoul, she thought, knowing the grenade would catch him too. Her aim was solid, and the grenade box bounced off one lab table, then fell to the floor near the group of guards and scientists.

The two guards immediately leaped away, one sliding over the table, the other one dashing for the front of the room. One of the scientists was also at the perimeter and—unfortunately—jumped away in surprise.

When the grenade activated, it caught only two of the scientists in gas masks. Luckily, that included the one holding a tin with warning labels on it, presumably the poison tablets.

Marasi's grenade would keep them frozen. But now she had to deal with the others *without* raising an alarm. The free scientist was cringing at the side of the room, so Marasi dashed forward and slammed her rifle's butt into the arm of one guard, who had been pulling out a pistol. Moonlight moved behind her—hopefully dealing with the other guard, because the man Marasi had attacked decided to slam into her, shoving her back against a table full of beakers.

She grunted as he rammed her own rifle up almost to her neck. Glassware shattered on the floor around her, and a part of her panicked. The part of her that still, even after all these years, worried she wasn't good enough and didn't belong.

That part of her was a lot quieter than it had been. Because she *did* belong. This was *her* operation. And though this man was stronger than she was, he was only a common brute. Training beat strength.

She shifted, then let go of the rifle and stepped out with her left leg, shifting the man's weight—and force. As he stumbled, she wrenched out from his grip, rotated around behind him, then slammed his face down into the counter.

She recovered her rifle, sparing a glance for Moonlight, who was struggling. She'd disarmed her guard, but he'd in turn pressed her against the wall. As Marasi took that in, the wall distorted and a door popped into existence behind Moonlight.

Marasi barely caught sight of the stamp in Moonlight's hand as the door opened, and the woman fell backward through it—surprising the guard, who cried out as she pulled him down with her. Moonlight elbowed him in the face to cut off his cry, so Marasi finished off her guard with a rifle butt to the face, then turned to deal with the scientist, who was …

Destroying evidence? Marasi cursed and scrambled over to the woman and pulled her away from the trash can where she'd started a fire. Marasi kicked the trash can over, scattering charred notebooks and papers out of it.

"Marasi!" Moonlight cried.

Rusts. The scientist had found a large knife and joined Moonlight's fight. As Moonlight struggled to deal with the guard—who was trying to grapple her—the scientist raised the knife.

Making a quick judgment, Marasi swung up her rifle and snapped off a shot, killing the scientist with a well-placed bullet. The sound echoed in the tunnels like a screamed condemnation. Someone would hear that for certain.

Moonlight finished off her guard with her own knife, then was cut off from view as the door she'd made vanished. Marasi sat on the floor and groaned softly, the shimmering barrier of her slowness bubble just a foot away. She'd taken the risk to save people. She'd known what she was getting into. But now their operation was jeopardized.

So don't let it be wasted, she thought, hauling herself to her feet. As her slowness bubble came down, she pointed her rifle right at the two scientists.

"Make one move to open that tin," she said, "and I will kill you. I'm having a particularly bad day, so I wouldn't test that threat."

The scientist with the tin of poison gas tablets carefully set it down, then both raised their hands and backed away. Moonlight entered a moment later and began binding them. TwinSoul stumbled in behind her, holding to the doorframe for stability.

"I appear to have run afoul of your powers," he said to Marasi.

"Sorry about that," she said.

"I note two disabled guards," he said. "And one dead scientist. So the operation went well?"

"Marasi had to shoot one," Moonlight said, pulling one of the scientists' bonds tight, "to save me. I ruined it."

"No," Marasi said. "It was my fault for not helping fast enough."

"It is done," TwinSoul said. "We should see to the captives and secure an exit. What are those burned pages?"

"They destroyed evidence," Marasi said. "I assume about how they were accomplishing the Hemalurgy. I wasn't able to save it, so…"

Moonlight sniffed. "Looks like the cover of a book there. You saved that much."

"But none of the writings," Marasi said.

"I can rewind that later," Moonlight said, "with a stamp." She grabbed the burned remnants and shoved them into her sack. "TwinSoul is right. We should probably begin our extraction—that gunshot will bring people running."

"Extraction?" Marasi said. "Entrone said he was going to help an invading force attack. Moonlight, can enemy troops really reach us from … another world?"

"They're probably coming through Shadesmar," Moonlight said. "A dimension overlapping ours. It's how TwinSoul and I got here."

"Autonomy has access to … some very specialized troops," TwinSoul said. "Hard to control. Dangerous to unleash. I know their destructive power personally. While I'm more frightened of that bomb, an invasion by Autonomy's forces could also be catastrophic. Fortunately, the local perpendicularity—the portal to reach this world—is far to the south and carefully controlled."

"There's no other way?" Marasi asked.

The two shared a look.

"There are planets," Moonlight said, "where Autonomy has created such portals unexpectedly, and against all understood mechanics. I wouldn't be surprised if she's done that here, or is soon going to. Providing a means for her armies to attack."

So if Wax succeeded in stopping the bomb, there would be an invasion instead. Marasi took a deep breath. Even more reason they couldn't run—not until they knew what was happening with that army. For now though, she unlocked and yanked open the cell door, spilling light across the ragged prisoners. They pulled back from the light like mistwraiths in the night.

"I'm Marasi Colms," she said, fishing her credentials from her pocket. "Elendel Constabulary."

"Oh, thank the Survivor!" a man said, stumbling forward and taking her hand. His suit had once been nice, and he had a few tufts of hair on an otherwise bald head. Did she … recognize him?

"You're in Bilming politics," she said. "You served as the local advisor to the Senate."

"Y-yes," he stuttered. "Pielle Fromed. I was head of the opposition party for the Bilming Council. I still am … I think…"

Most of the others looked like ordinary citizens, but there was a Terriswoman in the rear with kinky hair. That was … yes, she was a major newspaper owner, wasn’t she? Editor of the *Seasons*? Marasi had been interviewed by her staff the other year … It was a newspaper that had been sympathetic to Elendel interests.

Preservation … Entrone hadn’t merely been experimenting on his citizens, he’d been experimenting on his political opposition. It was shockingly brazen. How had he made these people vanish without anyone getting wind of it?

The editor of the *Seasons* accepted Marasi’s help as Moonlight ushered the captives into the main room. “Listen,” the woman said. “I think they have an army of some sort! I’ve … I’ve been taking notes…”

She almost fainted as Marasi helped her stand. But she pressed a notebook into Marasi’s hands. “There isn’t much. But you *must* believe me.”

“I do,” Marasi said. “We’re here to stop them.”

“Locate a place they call the Community,” she said. “I think it’s where their barracks are.”

“We’ll stop them,” Marasi promised, leading her to the others. “We have to get these people out of here,” Marasi then said to TwinSoul. “Immediately.”

Together, the three of them ushered the poor captives along. They were slow, they were tired, and they were underfed. It took a dangerously long time to get them all into the tunnel. And as Marasi was preparing to lead them back toward the elevators, she heard noises from that direction.

With a sinking feeling, she saw a good two dozen guards—soldiers, really; probably the ones who had been standing watch in the building above—come piling around the turn in the tunnel.

This had just gone from quiet infiltration to full-on war.

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The Set soldiers, spotting Marasi's group, immediately organized in the tunnel, using the natural curve as cover. Fortunately, this bought Marasi and her team a few precious moments—the enemy didn't know what they were facing, and so took up a defensive posture.

Marasi ushered the former captives back toward the room, though the flimsy drywall would offer very little protection against gunfire.

TwinSoul, however, knelt and put both hands on the ground. "Moonlight," he said, "I'll need extra fuel. Water will not be enough for this."

She swiftly dug out one of the glowing jars and tossed it to him. A line of crystal grew from him and around the jar, opening the top. His crystals began to grow faster—in moments he'd created a chest-high wall of roseite in front of them.

Gunfire rang out from the other end of the tunnel, making the former captives cry out as they crowded back into the room. Rifle in hand, Marasi threw herself against TwinSoul's improvised fortification next to Moonlight. She risked a glance over the roseite mound—he'd made this one opaque, perhaps to give the enemy less information.

She ducked back down as a bullet blasted a few chips off the front of the fortification. TwinSoul clearly had to concentrate to keep this large a barrier up. He had settled down with his legs crossed and his hands in fists, knuckles pressed together in front of him, his head bowed. The crystal-stone had grown up over his arms in an odd way. Marasi turned to Moonlight.

“Can you make a door in the ground?” Marasi said. “There might be tunnels beneath us.”

Moonlight shook her head. “Even if there were, the thickness of the stone would be far too great for my stamp.”

“I believe, my lady Marasi,” TwinSoul said, “that you should allow me to take the people we’ve freed and hasten them to the exit. It seems these soldiers were guarding the shipping bay above. So if I can push through them, I can get the civilians to safety.”

“That would be good,” Moonlight said. “Marasi and I can escape farther into the tunnel complex—and the enemy might be so focused on you and your escape that they don’t notice us.”

“I can’t allow that,” Marasi said as bullets flew overhead. “TwinSoul, there are at least two dozen soldiers over there. You can’t manage them on your own. No offense, but you can barely walk down a corridor without support.”

“No offense taken,” he said, his voice muffled as the roseite continued to grow up—and for some reason *around* him. “But in return … No offense, my lady, but you might perhaps be underestimating Silajana.”

The roseite completely encased him, forming a transparent boulder around him. His head bowed, with formal sash in place, he was still fully visible in his cross-legged posture through the rose-colored stone. Marasi frowned as it continued to expand rapidly. The size and speed of this creation seemed to need the help of the glowing substance from the jar, which was being drained as the roseite grew.

Bulges formed at the sides of the boulder, like … smaller boulders? Only longer. Then two more formed on the bottom rear of the boulder. Marasi cocked her head, her back to the fortification mound, rifle across her knees. Actually, with the smaller boulder forming on the top, it had almost taken on the shape of … of a …

Thick stone fingers formed on the ends of the two protrusions at the sides, then massive roseite arms spread out, stone grinding against the stone ground as the lower parts formed knees and feet. TwinSoul at the center, the thing heaved itself up—a twelve-foot-tall stone behemoth. The crystal didn’t bend, but had formed joints, like armor.

A man made of rock, like some mythological creature, with a head on the top, broad shoulders, and trunklike legs. TwinSoul sat at its heart, legs crossed, fists pressed together in front of him. But his head rose and his eyes snapped open, glowing softly, as his creation ripped free of the lines of roseite connecting it to the ground.

The fortification started to disintegrate right away, but the soldiers’ attention was totally focused on the stone monstrosity that advanced, its head scraping the top of the tunnel. Their gunfire intensified, bullets hitting with a pop and spray of stone. TwinSoul barely seemed to mind. He stepped in front of Marasi and moved his construct’s hands in front of him, growing something out of them.

“Behold!” he said, his voice somehow booming through the tunnel. “By the grace of Silajana, Suna, Vishwadhar, and the Twelve Primal Aethers, I am Sanvith Prasanva Maahik va Sila, Grand Aetherbound of the twelve kingdoms, Raj of the Coriander Court. And these people are under *my* protection.”

To punctuate his words, a colossal mace finished forming from roseite in his stone fingers—with a huge bulb at one end, like that of a tulip. He let it *thump* to the rock beneath him, shaking the ground.

Some soldiers continued to fire. Others up and ran. Chips blasted off the construct, but the holes filled in immediately. The jar of pure Investiture—still half full—had been overgrown by the roseite and was near the rear of the large stone figure, its glow illuminating TwinSoul from behind.

“Silajana demands that I warn you,” he announced, “you have been given this rebirth to bless, encourage, and uplift those around you. By your actions here, you prove this gift wasted. If you are destroyed today by resisting my defense of these innocents, you reject your great blessing—and may not be given rebirth again for many, many centuries. Lay down your weapons and let us pass, or suffer my wrath.”

He certainly had a way with words. Moonlight grabbed Marasi by the shoulder, gesturing for them to retreat past the building with the hiding civilians. For the moment however, Marasi remained rooted, amazed by the sight of TwinSoul's construct raising the mace.

"It appears," he announced, "that my offer has been rejected. In turn, your offer of conflict is accepted. Prepare yourselves!" With that, he charged down the corridor, each footstep making the ground tremble.

Marasi finally allowed Moonlight to pull her back. In the flimsy structure—over the cacophony of gunfire, screams, and the impact of stone on stone—they told the captives to arm themselves, then follow TwinSoul to the way out.

Then Marasi and Moonlight exited and hurried down the main corridor, finding a darkened side passage to slip through. Hopefully, this would let them avoid any reinforcements that might come up the main passage.

"Will he be able to get them out, do you think?" Marasi whispered as—using light from one of the two remaining jars—they made their way through the tunnel complex. Marasi spotted a sign pointing toward THE COMMUNITY.

"TwinSoul is the best chance they have," Moonlight replied. "I think he can manage it. He has the pure Investiture—and as long as that holds, he'll be nigh invincible. He can shrink and grow his juggernaut as he needs, to get through smaller corridors. If they try to cut the electricity, he can even push the elevator all the way to the top—or create a new one from roseite."

More gunfire sounded from behind. Marasi hoped it was the civilians arming themselves and firing to protect their retreat. She was certain she heard more footfalls and shouts coming from the main tunnel.

Moonlight looked back and smiled. "Don't worry," she said. "He'll be fine. And this is exactly what we need. Prasanva is an absolute *artist* at drawing attention when he sets his mind to it."

"You willing to keep going forward?" Marasi asked.

"If there really is a perpendicularity here," she said, "then … yes. As much as I want to get out with this information, protecting the planet must come first." She hesitated. "I'm new to this large-scale sort of thinking. Spent a long time looking out for myself and my own goals. Sorry if I come off as terse or too quick to want to retreat."

Marasi nodded, noting some light up ahead. She slipped forward quietly, and Moonlight covered up the jars in her rucksack. Together they approached another tunnel, lit with mining lights. The natural tunnel vanished to the right, but to the left the stone had a different cast to it. Marasi pointed at the jagged sections of rock on the ceiling and walls.

“They blasted here,” she whispered. “This is a section they opened up and expanded.”

Moonlight pointed to another sign. The Community, whatever it was, could be found this way. Marasi held out hope that Gave and the Set weren’t *quite* so zealous as to let Autonomy’s armies in. He’d sounded hesitant, at least. Smarmy as the man was, even he realized this was extreme. But he also had seemed worn down. As if he felt he couldn’t fight or resist.

As they snuck farther along the blasted-out tunnel, Marasi was pulled out of her thoughts. Were those sounds coming from the tunnel behind them? Something following them?

Moonlight seemed to hear the sounds too, because she turned and glanced that direction. They shared a look, then hurried forward, hoping to stay ahead of whatever it was.

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As Wax and Wayne neared the end of the tunnel, Wax noticed his friend sniffling and trailing behind. In the light streaming through the holes in a passing manhole cover, Wax saw that Wayne had sudden bags under his eyes.

"This might not be the best time to store up health," Wax whispered softly.

"I'm runnin' low," Wayne mumbled. "I feel like I'm gonna need every bit I can store. That, or I'll die one of these times somebody shoots me. That's right terrifying, it is. Don't know how you all deal with it." He paused. "If we get inna fight, I'll stop. Just need to squeeze a little extra in during breathers, you know."

Wax didn't say anything. This was more a matter of comfort to Wayne than anything practical. Wayne wouldn't be able to store up much in the time they had. It took a Feruchemist months storing health to get a full metalmind.

The tire tracks stopped at the end of the tunnel, where the giant concrete tube dumped out over the ocean. Wax was used to the relatively sheltered and calm waters of the Elendel docks—where the waves were so placid, you could be on a large lake. Here on the promontory that Bilming occupied, the waters chopped and churned, crashing against the docks. No wonder the Bilming navy was made up of such hulking metal monstrosities. He could see them in a row in the near distance, six terrible petrol-powered warships, each larger than the one before.

It was strange to think that, even combined, they posed an insignificant threat compared to the bomb Wax was hunting. All that work to create weapons of war, invalidated by a single discovery.

He gestured to a final hatch and ladder, which must lead to the lab. As soon as he and Wayne emerged onto a street by the docks, a door slammed nearby. Wax spun, scanning the warehouses.

“There,” Wayne said, pointing. “Third one down. Someone was watchin’ out the window too.”

The two glanced at each other, then took cover as gunfire exploded from the window. Conventional bullets and guns, his steelsight told him.

No aluminum weapons, Wax thought. *They sent those Allomancers to try to deal with us, but didn’t have time to otherwise prepare. We might finally be ahead of them.*

He increased his weight with his metalmind, then Pushed the next round of gunfire away—flinging the bullets back through the wooden walls and glass windows. Curses followed, giving him and Wayne a chance to scramble closer. Wayne nodded, so Wax increased his weight and hit the entire building with a Steelpush, anchoring himself from behind.

The wall shook, and a section was ripped free by its nails and a window housing. Wayne leaped in through the hole and dropped a few gunmen inside. Wax followed with Vindication raised, three precise shots bringing down the gunmen Wayne couldn’t reach. As they fought, a truck revved its engine and barreled out on the other side of the warehouse, tires screeching. Wax caught sight of two others ahead of it. A small convoy escaping into the evening.

A quick survey of the large room told him an entire story. Laboratory desks and machinery, stripped bare in a frenzy. Debris on the floor. Torn corners of paper still stapled to the wall where charts or schematics had been hastily ripped down. Dangling chains indicated that something had been constructed here, built in the center of those desks.

They hadn’t expected Wax to dare raid the Silver House or find the tunnel. He was only one step behind now.

Wax launched himself after the truck, decreasing his weight and flying through the large garage doors to track the truck as it screeched around another corner, nearly toppling in its haste.

Wayne would take care of the stragglers. Wax *needed* to know what was in those trucks.

He roared into the air in a rush, gaining height, and spotted the last of the three trucks heading back into the heart of the city. He'd spent the whole day running to catch up, to tease together plots that had been in motion for years. He was tired of half answers, of feeling like he was a hundred steps behind his sister.

Now he had solutions in sight. Those trucks held real answers, perhaps even the bomb itself. He'd be damned to an eternal pit of ash before he let them get away.

He Pushed off a manhole cover, gaining more height. From there, streetlamps—which were just starting to come on as the sun neared the horizon—became his anchors, like stepping stones across a lake. He Pushed on a pair at a time for lift and momentum, then began using buildings as enormous anchors. Then a moving car, to gain even more speed, borrowing its momentum.

Air became a whistle, then a roar around him—his mistcoat tassels whipping and snapping. His furious pace let him gain on the three trucks, even as they moved at speed on the highway. He had almost reached the last one in line when a slot opened in the back door and the barrels of several automatic rifles—aluminum—peeked out.

They'd saved the good weapons for themselves as they fled. A hail of aluminum bullets followed. Wax moved by instinct. His pursuit so far had been too direct, making him an easy target.

He dodged to the side as the bullets cracked in the air. He lurched away from the highway over cars full of startled civilians, then between two buildings to give him cover. There he ground to a stop, boots on asphalt, tassels falling still around him.

This isn't right, he thought. His path following the trucks had been obvious, but their path along the highway was more so. Could they be playing him yet again? He launched himself off a bullet, then gained speed by Pushing against the buildings to the sides, rattling windows—cracking a few as he warped their metal housings.

In Elendel, he had to hold himself back. Moderate his actions to minimize property damage. But Harmony had set Wax on this path, and you didn't bring Dawnshot out of retirement to play nice. The lives of millions were at stake.

He'd break a few windows to stop it. Hell, he'd break a few necks. He barreled up over cars, ignoring the cries of startled pedestrians as he moved parallel to the highway—trying to gain enough speed to catch up to the enemy truck, but keeping buildings between him and it. At the right moment he ducked back out, shattering windows, and darted across the highway—finding the third truck exactly where he'd hoped it would be.

It was in a pack of civilian vehicles, so Wax dodged behind cover again and followed, parallel, for another minute. He soared down that side street, feeling … alive. Propelled by steel, a bullet in flight. Perhaps he'd been without this for too long, and so had forgotten the rush, but he felt more in control than he ever had before.

Have to stop that truck slowly, he thought. *In case the bomb is inside.* He assumed the device couldn't be detonated simply by being jostled—his experiment the other day had shown that the real explosion required specific mechanical intervention. But he had to be careful regardless.

At the next intersection, he glanced right and saw what he'd hoped to see: the truck, in its haste to stay ahead of him, had pulled away from the pack of civilian vehicles into a more open stretch of the highway.

Wax darted in, over the edge of the highway, and increased his weight tenfold. He slowed in the air as a result, and hit the side of the passing truck with a Steelpush, *grinding* it into the highway's sidewall. It jostled more than he would have liked, but it did slow.

Wax changed trajectory, staying alongside the truck, forcing it into the sidewall until its tires burst and it stopped. He hit the ground near the broken rear door, sighting three unsteady gunmen within. He took them out, then drilled a bullet right through the front wall of the truck, hitting the driver in the back of the head. But other than those people, the truck was empty.

It *was* a decoy.

Damn it!

He launched back into the air, Pushing off the truck, bending and warping the crumpled roof as he sought height. Such a Push could only take him up so far—the farther you went from your anchor, the less force you could Push upon it.

He reached the zenith of what his anchor could provide and spun, scanning the city below, searching for …

There. The second truck was racing along the highway ahead. He almost darted straight for it. But …

Three trucks. At least one decoy. He spotted another far ahead, on the straightaway. This *was* too easy. They were so visible on a highway like this; they could keep his attention, draw him away from …

He hovered there, still Pushing, holding himself upright—though wind began to blow him to the side, upsetting his anchor. As he began to lose altitude …

… he spotted it. A fourth truck with the same markings, winding its way through the side streets perpendicular to the highway. It was heading inward, toward the center of the city. He barely glimpsed it as it moved behind some buildings.

That was the one he needed to catch. He left the others, hoping his instincts were right, and dropped into the city. He slowed with a Push on the top of a parked automobile, cracking the windshield with his weight, then warped the hood as he landed. He launched forward through the center of a park, scattering a flock of ravens, then bounded up the side of a building—barely reaching the top as his Push gave out.

There was an invigorating thrill to the motion. The city was so full of metal, so packed with obstacles. In a chase, each could be an advantage. Wax could soar over buildings, get height, track the vehicle—and gain on it, as the truck had to keep to the roads and deal with traffic.

Wax dropped over the side of a building, then propelled himself between two others with the force of a swimmer pushing off the wall at the start of a lap. He swept around corners and almost seemed to be able to ride the cries of the people below, like a bird riding thermals in the desert.

Chases in the Roughs had their own charm. But nothing there could truly compete with the thrill of landing *inside* a building via the balcony, charging through, and emerging on the other side to find his quarry right below. A balcony railing was a springboard, and nearby structures let him fine-tune his descent.

Here, he could fly in a way he'd never been able to in that land of dust and stone. He could acknowledge that—no, *embrace* it—now that he had let go of his past.

The people in the truck ahead pulled open another slot on the back door. Wax sighted with Vindication, but not toward the window. Toward the door itself.

He plugged it with a hazekiller round, one with a secondary explosion designed to rip apart Hemalurgist bodies. It blasted the door to shrapnel and split open the rear of the truck. As the gunmen stumbled away, Wax got a view inside. No bomb, but a ton of boxes, ledgers, and documents.

That would have to do. He let the truck pull ahead as the gunmen started laying down fire. Wax increased his weight and shoved on a grate below him in the street—bending and twisting it out of the way as he dropped through and entered the storm drain tunnels again.

He twisted in the air, delivered two bullets into the tunnel wall behind him, then Pushed off those—and the remnants of the grate that had plunged into the mud—to send himself screaming through the tunnel right under the street.

Wax came out a second later, blasting a manhole cover off into the air. He landed, one foot on either side of the open manhole, and increased his weight many hundreds of times—completely draining his metalmind. Then he Pushed.

His feet skidded a few inches on the concrete.

The truck crumpled as if it had hit a solid wall, the front mashing like tinfoil, doing unfortunate things to the driver. The back end of the truck lurched up into the air, then slammed down, trailing loose-leaf pages. One of the wheels rolled completely free, straight through the front window of a nearby building. A liquor store, Wax noticed with a wince. Wayne would *not* appreciate that.

The street fell quiet as other cars stopped, their drivers cowering in their seats or—more commonly—staring slack-jawed. Wax took a few deep breaths, his pulse racing, his body electric. His mind …

Focused on the job. He released another breath, and was surprised by how calm he felt. A part of him … a part of him had worried about returning to the field again. Worried that by experiencing these kinds of thrills, he'd view his normal life as mundane, lacking.

It didn't happen. He could go on a chase like that through the city anytime he wanted in Elendel, as long as he wasn't *quite* so flagrant about the property damage. He could even bring Max along, and have someone to share in the joy. He didn't need this, not as he once had.

What a wondrous thing that was to confirm. He took a deep breath, then rounded the truck.

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Marasi and Moonlight were being hunted.

Something was back there, something that seemed not quite human. It made a sound like nails or claws on stone, accompanied by unnatural growls. Marasi hurried through the blasted-out tunnel, Moonlight at her side, trying to balance their speed. If they moved too quickly, they might run straight into a patrol. But if they slowed too much, then whatever was back there would catch up to them.

So they moved in fits, hurrying a distance they could see by the light of mining lamps, then pausing to scout out their next rush forward. This part of the tunnel complex was far more built up than the one they'd come from, with many more turns. But they were able to follow the signs, heading ever closer to the Community. They passed more drywall rooms, some clearly occupied, and they had to find improvised cover several times as groups of people hurried past.

These weren't soldiers though. Mostly workers or scientists. Judging by their whispered conversations, Entrone had ordered everyone to their quarters. There was a sense of frantic worry to the people—but also a single-minded anxiety. That helped, as they weren't paying much attention to their surroundings.

As Marasi and Moonlight hid from one of these groups beside some boxes, Marasi worried the thing chasing them would catch up. Yet it was creeping along, not rushing. Perhaps … perhaps it was hiding too?

Moonlight eventually whispered for Marasi to wait, then ducked into a room that—through the cracked door—seemed unoccupied. She emerged moments later with two lab coats, and they started moving through the corridor as though they belonged there. The disguises were flimsy, but no one gave them a second glance, despite Marasi's rifle.

Soon, a voice echoed through the tunnel. "Stay calm. Don't worry. I am in the Community making preparations for our new arrivals. I want all of you to settle in and wait. This is what we've planned for; we are ready."

It was Gave Entrone. His voice came from some speakers that lined the hallway—a technology that was becoming more common since its invention a few years back.

Hearing his voice finally undermined Marasi's hope that Gave would resist the invasion. This complex, the supplies … everything about it indicated the truth. This was a bunker, the launching point of an invasion—and a place for Entrone's favorites to be protected from the coming annihilation.

A haunting worry whispered this was only part of it. Marasi had to stop Entrone, but that wouldn't protect Elendel from the bomb Telsin had trained on it. For that, she had to trust that Wax and Wayne were fulfilling their half of the mission. Her duty was to deal with this oncoming army. The men of gold and red.

The tunnel eventually expanded to a large cavern. But curiously, the far wall was straight wood, from floor to ceiling. And it felt like that wall bisected the chamber—which, judging by the slope of the blasted-out ceiling, was extremely large. The wooden wall had several darkened rooms built up against it. Indeed, the entire chamber was silent and mostly dark, lit only by a few emergency lights.

Marasi and Moonlight stopped at the mouth of the cavern. Was this the Community? Why split the cavern like that? Whatever the reason, the order to quarters had been obeyed, and apparently any soldiers in the area had gone to deal with TwinSoul. That let Marasi and Moonlight enter the cavern alone.

Soon after, those sounds came from behind again. Taking Moonlight by the shoulder, Marasi pulled them between two buildings beside the large wall. From this scant shelter, she watched as something entered the mouth of the cavern. It stood on four elongated legs and had an unnervingly long neck, with a head that wasn't entirely canine. It had features that, even shadowed as they were, evoked an image that was … too human. A dog's nose, or something approximating it, but human eyes set forward on its skull.

It had no clothing, but also no fur. Two spikeheads jutted from its shoulders. She'd heard of something like this before—Wax had encountered something similar in the tunnels beneath Elendel. Now, after studying the book Death had given her, she recognized what it was. A Hemalurgic monstrosity.

One use of the art was to create Metalborn. But the Lord Ruler had also used Hemalurgy to create twisted versions of human beings. The kandra had arisen from that work, as had the koloss. Creating those had required precision use of spikes—the knowledge of a god. If you tried to approximate such designs, you were likely to kill your subject. Or stumble into some kind of half-creation. A twisted mutation, leaving a being's soul mangled by the spikes.

The Set, it seemed, had found a permutation that was viable but grotesque. The thing sniffed the air, then prowled carefully into the cavern. It knew they were there. It paused where Marasi and Moonlight had stopped to inspect their surroundings—a spot that was barely thirty yards from their current hiding place. The abomination made a hooting sound that echoed in the cavern, and other voices—dozens of them—replied.

Moonlight gripped Marasi's shoulder, then pointed. She'd made a door in the side of the structure they'd been hiding by, and they slipped into a dim room built up against the wooden wall bisecting the chamber. Two windows looked through it.

Marasi didn't have a good view through them, not from her corner next to Moonlight. The door vanished, and a few moments later scratches sounded at the wall they'd passed through. Silence followed, then a thumping at the main door. It held, for now.

Marasi unslung her rifle, glanced at Moonlight, then nodded toward the windows. Perhaps they could escape through those? She stepped over to look through, and found … a town?

Neat rows of houses lined streets within a vast chamber, bigger on that side than this one. It was lit from above with floodlights. Someone had painted imitation flowers and grass on the floor in wide swaths, and others had erected sculptures meant to imitate foliage. People in everyday clothing—skirts, trousers, day dresses—walked the "streets," though there were no horses or automobiles she could see.

"What in Preservation's name?" Marasi whispered. "I suppose … this is the Community they built for themselves to escape the destruction above?"

She frowned. A short time ago, she might have theorized it was designed to withstand the second ashfall, but she was now mostly certain that was a hoax. The bomb and the invading army were the true threats.

Behind them, the thing stopped scratching at the door. She wasn't certain that was a good sign; it might have gone to get help.

"There's something off about this entire place," Moonlight said. She rapped on the window. "I think this is one-way glass. See the tinting? And those people in the next chamber? They don't appear to have heard the order to quarters or the fighting. They're too calm."

"We could still escape in there."

"Those twisted things will follow us," Moonlight said. "The strain the Set has developed can track like a hound, but think almost like a person."

"Can we fight them?" Marasi said, checking her ammo.

"I'm not … natively a soldier," Moonlight said. "I can defend myself if I have to, but…" She seemed concerned as she glanced toward the door.

Shouts came from outside. Troops arriving.

"You have another stamp," Marasi said. "One you said can transform you."

"Into someone else," she said. "Someone with a different past, different training, different … talents."

"Can *that* person fight?"

Moonlight took a deep breath. "Yes. Better than fighting though, she should be able to vanish. Hide. But the person I would become … she wouldn't be *me*. I've always wanted to try this specific transformation, Marasi, which is why I have the stamp. But it's dangerous.

"This one won't wear off as easily as the others—it will be permanent until I decide not to maintain it. And when I'm someone else, stamped like this, I don't think the same. One of these times, I'll change and never come back. Yet, with the jar of pure Investiture as a power source … I can try this. I can really try it."

Moonlight dug out the stamp, then stared at it with the same air Marasi had seen in Wax when cleaning one of his guns.

"You're telling me," Marasi said, "that transforming yourself into another person *isn't* magic?"

Moonlight grimaced. "All right. I'll admit those ones feel more mystical. It all makes sense if you understand the Dor…"

Marasi glanced through the window, then back at the front door. Shouts were converging outside. Rusts … it sounded like a lot of soldiers. Marasi raised her gun, then hesitated.

"Those monsters track through scent. What if you made me a door in this wall, and I jumped through? Next, you could distract them—make a big fight of it—then vanish, like you say. They might not know what happened to me; they might assume we both ran."

"That's a solid plan," Moonlight said. She took a deep breath. "All right. I *have* wanted to try this. I intended to convince Kell to give me some of that Investiture so I could. Never thought I'd be using this in the field though. I can fight them in this form, but that would leave you alone."

"I can't just run, Moonlight," Marasi said. "It's my fault we drew those troops. Beyond that, the Basin is my home. I can't leave it to Entrone and his plans."

Moonlight nodded sharply. "Let's do it. I should have an advantage, as they might come after me with batons and bayonets. Too much gunfire could disturb whatever they're doing in that Community. You'll notice the Set hasn't done the smart thing here, which would be shooting up this entire room with prejudice."

"Forward then," Marasi said.

Moonlight dug something from her sack, a little device that she read some numbers from. "If I ask, give me the distance twenty-seven sixty-three, inclination twelve degrees. And show me this map." She held out a notebook. “I don’t have time to explain why.” She popped the top off the jar of Investiture, then dipped her stamp into that light and used it on the wall—making the door for Marasi. “That should make it hold longer than usual.” Then she held the other stamp to her wrist. “I hoped to have Kelsier here to pull me out if things went wrong. You might have to reexplain to me why I need to fight those soldiers.”

“What do you mean?”

“I might not have all my memories,” Moonlight said. “This will *completely* rewrite my past. My soul will think my parents moved to a different kingdom on my homeworld, and that I was born and raised there. I will change personalities entirely. I wrote it all out, but … well, I’m never *quite* sure how an Essence Mark will function until I try.”

“Wait,” Marasi said. “You didn’t mention *that* part of—”

Moonlight pressed the stamp down on her wrist.

Then began to transform.

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Unlike TwinSoul—who had tapped the pure Investiture like a keg, drawing it forth slowly as he needed it—Moonlight took the entire jug in one metaphoric slurp, sticking her hand into it and drawing it in. Her hair shrank to a bob and became *luminous.* Incredibly, her skin managed to outshine it—glowing from within like her core was ablaze. But with a white fire somehow far more pure than any worldly flame.

Power swirled around Moonlight, and she even appeared to rise off the ground, though she was simply up on her tiptoes. She let out a long, satisfied sigh, then turned to Marasi. Glowing like some divinity of lore. A being of radiant energy. She smiled through too-perfect lips, blessed from within by her natural brilliance.

The glow started to fade almost immediately, but she knelt on the ground and began drawing with her finger. She consulted the map, and the notations on it that Marasi showed her. She nodded, and light flooded from her, leaving a traced image on the ground. It looked a little like the map—a quick sketch of the Basin, but with a strange rune at the center.

Once she finished, her light stabilized, then brightened. She sighed in satisfaction again and stood in the center of the circular drawing of light. Only then did she address Marasi.

“Ah!” she said, her voice slightly higher pitched than before. “A mortal! How are you, child?” She searched around the room without waiting for an answer. “I seem to be in an unexpected location.”

“You’re in Bilming,” Marasi said. “Underground.”

"Don't recognize it."

"The Elendel Basin?" Marasi said, and was rewarded with a blank stare. "You just drew a map of it on the ground."

"Oh," Moonlight said, looking at her feet. "So I did. How curious." She clasped her hands behind her back, humming softly to herself. When she noticed Marasi gaping at her, she looked to one side, then the other. "Ah. Did you have a boon to request of me, child? Something I can do for you?"

"There are soldiers outside," Marasi said, pointing as the door began to thump and crack. "Who want us dead."

"Bother," Moonlight said, then began moving her hands in the air, drawing a complex network of lines that hung and glowed there. She finished with a flourish, and the lines faded into the wall, which stopped cracking, despite the people pounding on it.

"Who are they?" Moonlight said. "Nasties from the Rose Empire? Or another group of Wyrn's faithful, come to waste their time trying to fight their betters?"

"Uh," Marasi said, "they're just bad people. We had a plan to—"

"We?" Moonlight asked.

"You and I, before you changed."

"I have always been Shay-I," she said, gesturing. "Blessed of the Shay-ode."

Riiiight. Okay.

"O blessed one," Marasi said, trying something else, "your power is incredible, and your being divine. Please, will you grant me a boon?"

"Why, of course!" she said, perking up. "So polite! A rare quality in mortals."

"I need to escape through that door," Marasi said, pointing to the one in the rear wall, "which will soon vanish. I need the people outside to think I have left another way. With you. I understand you can vanish…?"

"Vanish? I'll use Aon Tye-A," Moonlight said. "But that is quite the blessing you ask. I'd need distance and inclination…"

"Oh," Marasi said. "Twenty-seven sixty-three, inclination twelve degrees? But can you really vanish—"

“Fine, fine. But if you flee through that door, they’ll find only me in here. An imperfect solution, devised by someone with poor planning skills. Here.”

She tapped Marasi on the forehead, then drew some symbols in the air with one hand. A second later a *duplicate* of Marasi appeared, made with some of Moonlight’s power. It started moving, though when Marasi tried to touch it, her fingers passed right through. That made it even more unnerving.

“Are you still here?” Moonlight said. “Scoot along, scoot along. Shay-I has it all in hand, child. I’ll deal with these, then make a great show of vanishing. Be certain to deliver the proper offerings for the blessing I’ve magnanimously gifted you, and be pious in your treatment of your gods.”

“Yup,” Marasi said. “Pious. I’ll be pious.” She stepped toward the door, then paused, noticing the last jar of light in the rucksack. She took the bag—which seemed to have some other useful equipment in it too—but handed Moonlight the burned notebook and leather folio of stamps.

“You’ll want these later, great one,” Marasi said. “They’re very important. Please take them and keep them safe.”

“Fine, fine,” she said, then shooed Marasi away with one hand, waving toward the breaking lines on the wall—which was being pounded in force now—with the other. “Hurry. They are almost through.”

Marasi threw the rucksack over her shoulder and—with regret—left her rifle. She needed to be inconspicuous, so the pistol she stashed in the rucksack would have to do. She also left the lab coat, counting on her clothing—still that of a common delivery driver, intended to blend in with the workers for the Set—to conceal her.

She then pushed through the door. As she closed it, she glimpsed Moonlight standing beside the Marasi doppelganger, drawing lines of light in the air with both hands as the far wall buckled and began to break.

Marasi ducked away from the windows—which were indeed one-way glass, disguised on this side as part of a large checkerboard pattern. She threw the rucksack over her shoulder and slipped into the peaceful neighborhood, hoping that this strange version of Moonlight would stick to the plan.

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In the back of the truck, Wax found a mess of papers and equipment. And three corpses.

Feeling a grim sense of purpose, Wax climbed in and checked each of the corpses—just in case they were feigning. He stopped before the final one. She was bloodied but breathing, and when her eyes slipped open there was a faint red glow to them.

“Ah,” she said in a rasping voice. “You *are* good at this. We thought we had taken enough precautions. Yet here you are. Breathing down our neck. Such drive. Such *individualism.* A shame that Harmony got you first.”

Wax backed away, leveling the gun at her.

“This body soon expires,” the creature said. “You need not concern yourself.”

“What are you?”

“You know what I am,” she whispered.

“Trell.”

“Your sister becomes Trell,” the thing whispered. “The name and mythology I prepared for her to adopt. But she has not achieved it yet. And I am not Trell. Rare is it that I speak to one directly as I do you.”

“Autonomy,” he whispered.

“Yes. Pierced by my metal. Soul open to my touch…”

Wax drew back farther, uncertain what to think.

The woman smiled, blood on her lips. “You have nothing to fear from me. I will not intervene against you and your efforts. Your sister does not understand this, Sword of Harmony. She pleads with me to act, but cannot see: It is only in the struggle to survive that a person—a people—achieves their potential."

"This city," he said. "Everything in it. This is your fault."

"It is the fault of those who strive for more," Autonomy said. "And to their credit in the accomplishment. Though, I do not think your sister understands the nature of true Autonomy yet. Her attempts have a … fabricated, forced uniqueness to them. Not the raw wounds of true individualism.

"She will learn. The longer she holds the power, the longer she becomes an avatar of my nature, the more she will see and understand. If she survives. You should be proud of her. Though she flirts with her own destruction, her efforts have kept this world alive. I would have attacked it years ago otherwise."

Wax frowned, stepping closer. "Where is the bomb?"

"Aaah. It is not the bomb you should worry about. It is the destruction I have sent if that bomb fails."

"I think you're bluffing," Wax said.

"Think what you wish. But you yourself know the strength—the capacity—one has in those moments before death. It is when the soul is pushed to the limit that true exceptionalism manifests. And so, there must be a consequence—as final and terrible as death—for failure."

"And what must we do," Wax said, "to get you to leave us the hell alone?"

Autonomy's bloody lips smiled. "Prove you deserve it." She closed her eyes. And the body stopped breathing.

Rusts. Could he believe a word of what Autonomy had said? Could he risk ignoring it? Either way, it left him more rattled than the chase had.

He quickly began digging through the papers in the back of the truck anyway. He found much of it chopped to shreds, then soaked in buckets of water. They'd been trying to prevent him from getting the information.

Fortunately, he found a notebook that was only halfway soaked and began flipping through, reading records of test launches. Rusts … these “self-propelled rockets” could travel thirty or forty miles. How had they launched them without anyone knowing?

The ships, Wax realized. *That’s why they built the navy—so they could test weapons out on the ocean.* The notes confirmed it. He checked the dates of the latest test.

They matched the dates of Gave’s “vacation.” They’d sailed out into the ocean to run tests. But the rockets had failed, or at least they hadn’t performed to desired levels. They couldn’t quite reach Elendel—though the notebook was full of ideas to get them to go the little farther they needed.

He put together everything of use he could find, then shoved it in a duffel bag he found near the corner. He had so little time to make sense of this, but surely somewhere in all this mess was a hint of where to find the bomb.

He slung the duffel over his shoulder and stepped out of the truck. People had begun gathering, including the poor shop owner who ran the liquor store. The man stood outside, mourning his shattered window.

Though Wax should have been on his way, he hesitated, then walked over and pressed some cash into the man’s hand. “Sorry,” he said. “Trying to prevent a catastrophe.”

The man gaped at the money, but before he could reply, Wax spotted something just inside the broken window.

“Hey,” he said. “Is that a case of *Logshine*?”

* * *

A short time later, Wax touched down at the laboratory where he’d left Wayne. As he’d hoped, the younger man had dealt with the enemies, even tying a few up. Now Wayne had settled down with a handkerchief that had someone else’s initials on it and was wiping his nose. He looked miserable.

Wax had never been forced to store health, so he could only imagine how it felt—particularly in the middle of a job. And now that the thrill of the chase was over, Wax was tired. Rusts, he shouldn’t join investigations without any sleep. He wasn’t twenty anymore.

He walked over to Wayne, who blinked up at him. Then Wax raised two bottles of Logshine, a beer brewed in the Roughs—best there was.

“Rusts, Wax,” Wayne said. “Where did you find *those*?”

“Amazing what comes up in the line of duty,” he said, handing one to Wayne.

“I ain’t had a bottle of Logshine in years.” The man actually teared up. “You … Rusts, mate. You really do care about me, don’t you?”

“I think it’s time,” he said to Wayne, “that we take a bit of a breather.”

“Can we afford to?”

“I need to dig through what I found,” Wax said. “And if we keep running into fights exhausted, we’ll get ourselves killed. I think we can spare a half hour or so. Sound good?”

“Good?” Wayne said. “It sounds *rusting amazing*.”

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Sneaking through this strange cavern unseen proved impossible for Marasi. The floodlights on the ceiling left little in the way of shadows, and the homes were built around a central park—including fake grass made of some wood chips painted green. Nothing would be more conspicuous than someone being furtive.

So, feeling utterly exposed and half expecting to hear gunshots, she walked down one of the picturesque rows of townhouses. Trying to pretend she belonged. After the urgency of rushing from one fight to another, it felt surreal.

No one in this cavern appeared to have any idea of the battles beyond it. She passed couples walking hand in hand. A man worked on a play structure in the yard of a home, his children eager for the swings to get connected. A man in a white uniform strode past, delivering jars of food to each home, humming to himself.

It was bizarre. It was all too peaceful, too normal … and there was no metal. The windows had wooden frames. The buildings were made of brick or clay, no need for nails. The street had no lights or lanterns.

It was glaring once she noticed it. In fact, the only metal she was able to spot was in those floodlights high in the ceiling above. That made her even more aware of the rucksack she carried. Aside from the glowing jar, Marasi had some ammunition in it, and a few small explosive charges, along with bandages, cash, and some lockpicks and other tools. Moonlight was the type of woman who liked to be prepared.

Marasi pulled the sack tighter against her shoulder. Unfortunately, she was drawing attention. People turned to watch her as she passed. Conversations between promenading couples died. Eyes lingered on her, as if she were the one person on inspection day who'd neglected to wear a uniform.

Perhaps best to hurry through this strange neighborhood and see if there was some way out the other side. Yet would that actually help? Her intel said there was a way to the portal through the Community. She needed to find it.

The lord mayor mentioned going to the Community, Marasi thought. *He could be in here somewhere. Maybe he would lead me to it?*

As two women on the road passed by quickly, wearing day dresses and moving at a brisk pace, they shot several furtive glances at Marasi. That posture … Marasi's instincts said they were going to tell someone about her.

Those same instincts told her to go the other direction. But … she needed to find the people in charge. She almost asked Wayne what he thought, then felt like a fool. Over the years, she'd grown to rely on him. Not having him at her back … well, it felt wrong.

After a split second of consideration, she broke into a trot to follow those two women. They hurried into a two-story townhome with wooden trestles along the wall outside, being climbed by painted ropes to imitate vines.

Marasi peered in through the door and found the women clustered around not soldiers or officers, but a stately, middle-aged blonde woman. She wore a fine grey-blue dress: short overcoat, long skirts with a slight bustle. It was a style that had been popular a decade ago. The stately woman met Marasi's eyes, then hurried over and took her by the arm.

Marasi's instinct was to dodge away, but it wasn't a threatening move.

"Hurry, hurry," the woman said to Marasi. "Inside. You've already been seen by too many, dear. Drenya, close the drapes!"

Befuddled, Marasi let the woman pull her into the well-furnished room as Drenya closed the drapes. The third woman lit an oil lamp on the table. It felt … quaint to see it after years of electricity inexorably creeping into every home and light sconce.

“Fialia,” the stately woman said, “fetch the others. Kessi will want to meet her, obviously. And Abrem. He has been keeping notes. Hurry, hurry!” She then patted Marasi on the arm absently. “How are you, dear? Hungry? Thirsty? You must have had such a difficult time of it. You’re a survivor. Good for you.”

Drenya peeked out through the now-closed drapes, watching. She was a mousy younger woman in a dress that could have used some more color. “I don’t think Gord saw her, bless the Survivor.”

“Word will get to him eventually,” Fialia said, pausing by the door. “He’ll go straight to the mayor.”

“I’ll deal with Lord Entrone,” said the blonde woman, who settled Marasi in a seat. “Go!”

Fialia left and Marasi let herself be seated, trying to understand. They didn’t want the mayor to find out about her, so were these dissenters within the Set? But their clothing, these homes, this place …

And this woman. The stately blonde patted Marasi’s hand, then vanished into another room. Perhaps a kitchen? Marasi almost bolted. Perhaps they were trying to distract her from stopping Mayor Entrone? But then the blonde woman returned with some biscuits and tea.

Marasi gaped, flummoxed by the idea of a tea break in the middle of a dangerous incursion into enemy territory.

“Look at the poor thing,” said Drenya from the drapes. “It’s probably been *years* since she saw real food.”

“It’s all right,” the blonde woman said, offering the biscuits. “Don’t be afraid. We have plenty here—like in the old days. You remember?”

“The … old days?” Marasi said.

“Yes, before the disaster,” the blonde woman said. “Before the ashfalls. We are safe down here.”

“It was built to keep us protected,” the other woman said, stepping up. “You must be so strong to have survived up there, to have found your way here.”

Up there.

Oh, rusts. It finally came together for Marasi. All this time she'd assumed the pictures of ash falling, the strange moving image made with the models above, was a part of a plot to threaten the outside world. But no. The hoax hadn't been planned to be used in the future; it had already been perpetrated. On these people.

Rusts. They thought the world had been destroyed. And that they had been protected from it.

"How long," Marasi whispered, "have you been down here?"

"Seven years now," the blonde woman said, patting her hand. "Though we lived in much smaller caverns originally. This town—'Wayfarer,' as we call it—is about five years old."

"It was terribly difficult to build," the other woman added. "But it's *so* much nicer. Makes you think of the old days, doesn't it? With a sky and sunlight? Trees and plants?"

Marasi numbly took a biscuit and bit into it, partly to keep the blonde woman from forcing them on her. It was good, Marasi noticed absently as her mind raced. These people … they'd been tricked into believing the world was ending. Forced to live in a bunker underground. But why? Surely the Set had plenty of willing participants in their schemes; why keep some of them so ignorant? And how did this relate to the impending army or the bomb?

A few other people soon piled in, along with Fialia. Three women and one man, a stocky fellow with a belt full of stone tools.

"No metal," Marasi mumbled.

"Well, naturally," the blonde woman said. "The metal mutants can sense it. The only metal we dare use is a little aluminum to make lights and the speakers for the public address system."

The four others huddled, gaping at Marasi. Did she really look *that* much like she'd survived an apocalypse? She supposed her outfit was a little worse for wear, after multiple gunfights and struggles for her life. Plus the rucksack, and having no chance to wash up …

Well, maybe she did.

"You poor people," Marasi whispered.

"She's in shock," said mousy Drenya.

“Can you tell us what it’s like up there?” the man with the toolbelt said, stepping forward, a cloth cap in his fingers. “Are the ashfalls still strong? It’s been a year since we saw an outsider.”

“There have been others?” Marasi asked, confused.

“Once in a while someone from above finds their way through the tunnels, and our protections, to the town,” the blonde woman said, patting her hands. “I keep telling the mayor that we don’t *need* those protections—that we can take in far more people than we have now. But Gave Entrone is a stubborn man. He insists that outsiders are too dangerous.”

“Gave,” Marasi said. “Your … mayor?”

“Yes, he’s from the other caverns originally,” the blonde woman said. “Ones underneath Elendel. There are several complexes, and occasionally people from that one move here.”

“Entrone is a tyrant,” the man with the tools said. “He won’t let us help the world above. Won’t let us search for survivors. Won’t even let us explore the caverns. And when people like you come—”

The blonde woman shot him a glare.

“It’s all right,” Marasi said. “I need to know. Please, there are secrets here you don’t understand.”

“Well,” the blonde woman said, “when outsiders like you arrive … they get shipped off to one of the other caverns. We never get to talk for long.”

“And they … tell you about the world above?” Marasi guessed, connecting the clues.

“A world of ashes,” one of the other women said. “A destroyed land full of terrible metal mutants.”

“I saw one once,” the man said. “A terrible, twisted thing. Poor soul. It broke in here, and the lord mayor’s security force killed it.”

A Hemalurgic abomination, Marasi guessed, *let loose in here on purpose to keep these people frightened.*

“Newcomers,” the woman said, “can’t help sharing how terrible things are—then get taken away. We think the lord mayor doesn’t want them frightening us.”

“Quite the contrary…” Marasi said. “They’re actors. Brought in to prove his lies.”

Marasi looked around the room, meeting their concerned eyes. They were worried for her. They had no idea.

The blonde woman patted Marasi's hand yet again. "We keep hoping that we'll get word that people we knew … had survived…"

"I had three daughters," said the man with the tools. "In Bilming? It's been corroding me ever since I was saved, not knowing what happened to them. Please, miss. Do you have news of any pockets of survivors up above? The last refugee who came down here, he said the entire city was a wasteland, completely destroyed. But … *some* people must have lived…"

Marasi frowned. "Wait. You were *saved*? How did you end up here?"

The blonde woman forced another biscuit on her, and shared a glance with the others. "It was a random lottery," she finally said. "The scientists who discovered the impending eruptions realized they could save only a few. So they made an impossible decision, randomly selecting people."

"It wasn't *completely* random," one of the women said. "It was weighted toward women of childbearing age, for obvious reasons. And an emphasis on Allomancers or those from the lines of Allomancers. Again for obvious reasons."

"We couldn't bring our families," the man said, looking down. "We argued for it, once we woke here. Oh, how we tried to get the managers to see reason. But … eventually … we felt the earth shake, and we knew…"

"Then the lord mayor arrived," the blonde woman said, "and instituted stricter protocols."

"Tyrant," the man muttered.

"We still feel it shaking now and then," one of the women said, looking up. "From the explosions of the Ashmounts. It must be deafening out there. We are occasionally allowed up to glimpse your world, but not often. Too dangerous. Still, I've seen how it is out there. The distant rubbled city, the red sun, the suffocating ash. Like a funeral shroud…"

"How do you see these things?" Marasi asked.

"An observation room," the woman explained. "There's a ladder to it at the edge of the cavern."

That wouldn't lead to the room Marasi had seen with the projector—they were too far from there. She suspected that entire room was a test chamber, and that these people were somehow shown something more authentic-seeming, without such an obvious light and projector.

Regardless, she was now certain that was what the ruse was for. Along with actors sent to reinforce the illusion—who were then taken away “to another cavern,” so that they couldn’t slip up and reveal the truth. As long as none of the actual subjects of the experiment were allowed to leave, no one would ever know.

But why? So much work, for what?

Except … Allomancers.

“Some of you are Allomancers?” Marasi said.

“Yes,” the blonde woman said. “I’m a Rioter, though not even my family knew about my powers. Fialia is a Lurcher. Kessi a Soother.”

“I had two Allomancer parents,” the man said, “but I never got any powers myself. The others are similar.”

That was the final piece. Marasi knew what was happening. And as she put it together, another revelation struck her. She *did* know the blonde woman. There was a reason she was familiar.

She was Marasi’s distant cousin Armal Harms: a woman who had been kidnapped by Miles Hundredlives and the Vanishers seven years ago, during Wax’s first case in the city after his return.

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Marasi should have left right then. There was little she could learn from the people caught in the Set's experiment. Yet the implications weighed her down. So she sat in that plush seat with a biscuit, feeling overwhelmed, surrounded by people who'd been lied to for years.

Wax had been the first to notice that the kidnapped people had a history of Allomancy in their families. They'd thought them all women at first, though a few other mysterious kidnappings during the same time period had proven to be men.

Marasi and Wax had searched for these people for years, on and off. They'd worried that the Set had done terrible things to them, but had never imagined anything like this. Locking them all up in a bunker? Convincing them that the world had ended?

One of the Set's primary long-term goals was to gain access to Allomantic powers, and the fact that the Set had so much access to spikes indicated that some of those who had been kidnapped had met with gruesome ends. But this group, and the fact that only the most important Set members had spikes so far, whispered of a much longer-term plan. Down here, they'd have a literal breeding ground for children likely to be Metalborn—excellent for recruitment, or for creating spikes. It turned her stomach in knots, particularly when she thought to look at the women in the room and noticed that two might be pregnant.

That playground the man had been building earlier suddenly took on a darker cast. Yet … these people didn't seem terrified their children would be taken. There was a hope, and a good one, that Marasi had found them in time. Not to prevent all the trauma, unfortunately—these people had been stolen from their families and lives and locked down here—but at least the Set hadn't started turning them into spikes yet.

The lord mayor called the Community "Edwarn's project," she thought. This whole thing had been the scheme of Wax's uncle, a long-term solution to providing Allomantic powers to the Set. She suspected that upon his death, much of this infrastructure had been co-opted, with Telsin taking command and Autonomy breathing down their necks. A cavern that had been designed as an Allomantic eugenics experiment had now expanded to become a bunker housing the lord mayor's loyalists. Further experiments with spikes were leading to different innovations.

But this old experiment remained, and the people trapped in it. Marasi had stumbled upon the solution to one of her most troubling unsolved mysteries. She could rescue these people. Assuming she could save the world itself first.

"I know you," Marasi said to the blonde woman. "You're Armal Harms, aren't you?"

"Well, I was a Harms," the woman said. "Before marrying down here. Did I … know you?"

"I've only seen pictures," Marasi said. "I'm Marasi Colms. Steris's … cousin." It was the lie they'd always used, before her father had been willing to publicly admit to his infidelity.

"Steris?" Armal asked, perking up. "Is she … I mean…?"

"She's alive," Marasi said. "Armal … they all are. You've been lied to in a terrible way. I don't know how to be more delicate about this. There was no ashfall. The Basin didn't fall. It's a hoax." She grimaced. "You were all kidnapped by some horrible people."

Those in the room looked at one another.

"Ash sickness," one of the other women said.

The mousy woman nodded, then patted Marasi on the shoulder. "You're disoriented, seeing delusions, dear."

Marasi sighed. Of course the Set would have come up with an excuse like that—they'd want a fallback explanation in case someone snuck through the defenses.

“I can’t prove it to you now,” Marasi said. “Though I will find a way. Please, consider my words. They will soften the blow when you have to confront the truth. I’m a senior officer in the Elendel Constabulary.” She pulled out her credentials. “For years I’ve been trying to trace you: people kidnapped by a mysterious organization called the Set. They have other plans in motion—even more dangerous ones—which is why I can’t stay. But the truth is, Armal, that you were taken because they wanted Allomancers. And they are willing to play the long game to get them.”

Armal glanced upward—as small feet thumped on the upper floor, and the laughter of children drifted down.

“You *have* to agree it is odd,” Marasi said, “that you were kidnapped by a group of armed men during a robbery.”

“They had to act that way,” Armal said. “To hide what they were doing. To avoid a mass panic.”

“Posing as a group of thieves?” Marasi asked.

“It worked in the Words of Founding,” she replied. “The Survivor himself pretended to be a thief.”

Marasi didn’t have time to continue this argument. “I need to locate Gave Entrone,” she said. “Do you know where I could find him?”

At that very moment, as if decreed by Harmony, a voice blasted from a set of speakers outside. Echoing in the vast cavern through the public address system.

It was Gave Entrone, the lord mayor.

“Be warned, people of Wayfarer,” he said in a tinny broadcast voice. “A dangerous outsider has been spotted slipping through the outer tunnels, possibly coming in this direction. She is likely armed, and known to be very, *very* ash-sick.

“Treat her as extremely dangerous and report sightings of her to your neighborhood tranquility officer immediately. Do not approach her. Do not engage with her. She has killed already, and will kill again if given the chance.”

The group of people all looked upward, and Marasi tensed. How far would their congeniality extend now?

“Hell,” Armal said. “We have to hide her.”

“Others saw her entering,” the man with the tools said.

“We’ll rough up the room,” Armal said, “and claim she threatened us and ran out.” She looked to Marasi. “You’re confused and ash-sick. But … do you remember how to get out of here? The path through the caverns?”

“Forget that,” said the mousy woman, suddenly fierce. “Do you have weapons? Anything we could use to overthrow Entrone?”

“We’re *not* going to overthrow him!” Armal said. “All we need to do is follow our plan: sneak up to the surface, find survivors, and bring them here. Prove to everyone that we can do something to help. That will shift the lord mayor to our line of thinking.”

That was a noble philosophy. And also completely hopeless. Marasi did *not* have time to try to persuade them further. “Where is Entrone?” she said, standing.

“He has a new mansion at the edge of town,” Armal said. “Large, with the broadcast station in it. It’s dangerous there because he needs metals to work the devices—if mutants ever invade, they’ll go for him first.”

“How very brave of him,” Marasi said, hurrying to the window—the others moved aside for her. “No doubt he has a nice tunnel to the surface too. You know the flat outer walls? Those have one-way glass. They watch you through it.”

“Ash sickness,” one of the women hissed.

“Is there…” Marasi said, trying to figure out how to phrase it, “some kind of portal around here? Rusts. I don’t even know what it would look like. A large construction of some sort, maybe? Or an area that is specifically off-limits?”

They just stared at her, confused. *Should have expected that,* Marasi thought. Of course they wouldn’t know. They were captives, not confidants.

But something about that puzzled her. If Entrone was creating a portal for Autonomy’s army, why would he do it *here,* near these people? Why not do it in a more isolated portion of the cavern complex, away from his test subjects? Yet he’d specifically said he was coming *here* to open the portal.

She glanced to Armal—who was holding Marasi’s credentials, a frown on her face. “Why would you go to the trouble,” she said, “of carrying fake credentials? Going all the way to create a fake stamp, for this year’s date…?”

“She must be far gone,” one of the others said.

Armal met Marasi’s gaze, her frown deepening.

“It’s because I’m telling you the truth,” Marasi said. “Now I need to get to Entrone and stop him.”

Armal shook her head. “Marasi, we can help each other. Don’t do anything rash. We don’t like the lord mayor, but we don’t want violence. There has been too much death already. If we hide you, we can talk, plan.”

“No time for planning,” Marasi said, hurrying back across the room and seizing her rucksack. “Go ahead and rough up this room. Tell them I’m extremely dangerous—tell them at length. Maybe it will delay them a little.” She fished a pistol out of her rucksack—making them gawk at her. All but Armal, who took it in with a disappointed expression.

“Look,” Marasi said to them, “things are about to get *very* dangerous and *very* confusing in here. My friends have dealt with a large number of their soldiers, so there’s a chance I can handle Entrone alone. But if I don’t come back, you *need* to overthrow him. Millions of lives might depend on it.”

“We can’t do that,” Armal said. “Even if we wanted to, we don’t have weapons.”

“You *are* weapons,” Marasi said. “If we can just get you…”

Metals. That was why there weren’t any down here. The Set had imprisoned a large group of people who either had extraordinary abilities, or were likely to give birth to people with them. Telsin and the others knew that unless they were careful, they’d be overpowered by their own captives. Hence the lack of metals and the story of “mutants” who could sense it.

How did you keep a bunch of dangerous people captive? You convinced them that they weren’t actually captives.

Marasi turned and met Armal’s eyes. “Which way to the lord mayor’s home?”

“I…”

Marasi held her gaze until Armal glanced back down—at Marasi’s credentials—and then looked to the side.

“You know, don’t you,” Marasi said. “That what I’m saying is true? Or at least you suspect. You’ve always known something was wrong.”

“I have a family,” Armal said. “Children and a husband I love.”

“And if Entrone wins,” Marasi said, “they are doomed to a life in darkness. Armal, he is planning to take your children from you. You need to find yourselves some metals and fight back with everything you have.”

“Find metals,” one of the women said, with a sniff. “What do you want us to do? Lick rocks, hoping there’s some iron in them?”

“I don’t know if I believe you or not,” Armal said. “And I’m … I’m not going to fight, even if I had the weapons. Maybe I can take you to where Entrone lives. But that’s all.”

Idiot people, Marasi thought, grinding her teeth. Then she felt foolish. They weren’t idiots because they were scared. They had been abused, lied to, locked away without the sun.

She shouldn’t be berating them. Indeed, in her shame at having done so, she felt an odd moment of clarity. These people, and those like them, were the reason she did what she did. Her reason for being a constable. It was her job to rescue them.

“Just take me to Entrone,” Marasi said. “I’ll find a way to handle him.” She lifted the rucksack to her shoulder.

Then froze as she heard it clink.

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Wayne watched as Wax held the bottles over his head, then Pushed the caps off with a quick flip of Allomancy. Handy, that. When God had been designin’ Allomancy, had he considered that Coinshots would make good bottle openers?

Wax held one out to Wayne, who wiped his runny nose on his handkerchief, then took the bottle. He sighed, his head pounding, his body aching. Damn, he hated storing health. Made you feel like the stuff a fellow found between his toes after wearin’ his shoes too long.

He lounged back against the support running alongside the front of the billboard. They’d flown up here, naturally, because Coinshots liked being in the sky. Plus, Wax liked bein’ blatant. And what was more blatant than havin’ a beer in front of the city’s stupid propaganda poster?

The thing had a ledge in the front, so sitting was comfortable enough. This was presumably for the workers to erect the image: a nauseating picture of a fellow looking toward the sky, with lines of light spreading out behind him. INDEPENDENCE THROUGH SHARED STRUGGLE, it said. Wayne could have eaten the beer bottle wrapper and dumped a load the next day that made more sense than that.

The offending billboard was up high, pointed inward across the main highway. Toward the city’s central spire, Independence Tower, nicknamed the Shaw. After old Kredik Shaw.

Wax held his bottle out, and Wayne reached forward to clink the necks together. Then Wayne tipped his head back and drank, welcoming the strong taste. Hoppy, bitter. Like a good beer should be. Out in the Roughs they knew that. Why clean it all up, make it taste like somethin’ other than it was? City beers … they were for people that didn’t actually like beer.

The suds felt good on his throat, which turned all scratchy when he stored health. Like he was perpetually sick all the time, every day—but normally didn’t notice it because his body was good at covering it up. Only the moment he started storing health, the sickness got the upper hand.

Wax took a long pull on his own beer and relaxed into the taste, his eyes distant. Content.

“Remember that time,” Wayne said, “when you went to take the tops offa the bottles, but I’d smacked the beers on the table first, so they squirted out all over your head?”

“Which time?” Wax said.

“Heh,” Wayne said. “That joke never gets old.”

“Because it was ancient the first time you tried it.”

Wayne grinned. “I was thinkin’ of the first time, after you caught Icy Ben Oldson. You know, when Blinker was your deputy?”

“I remember.”

“Can’t believe you worked with that guy,” Wayne said, taking another drink. “He couldn’t shoot worth a bean.”

“He had other skills,” Wax said. “You can’t shoot worth a bean either, it should be noted.”

That was true. But honestly, Wax had terrible taste in deputies.

“I do remember that first time you got me by shaking the bottles,” Wax said, sipping his beer. “I remember it well. It was the first time you really seemed to smile.”

“Yeah, well,” Wayne said, “I’m good at pretendin’ to be things I ain’t, you know? I eventually put together how to feign bein’ a person who was worth somethin’. It’s a good lie. Still manage to believe it.” He took a drink. “Mosta the time.”

“Wayne…”

“I don’t need a speech, Wax.” Wayne rested his head back against the metal support, closing his eyes. “I’ll be fine. Just gotta put on the hat…”

“You’ve been feeling worse lately, haven’t you?” Wax asked. Annoying, perceptive fellow. “This isn’t only about MeLaan.”

Wayne shrugged, his eyes still closed.

“Out with it,” Wax said. “I gave you a beer. You owe me an answer—those are the rules.”

Ruin that man. He knew the rules.

“I’ve just been thinkin’,” Wayne said softly. “Rememberin’ my family, and how ashamed my ma would be of me for turnin’ out to be a murderer. I’ve been workin’ all these years to pay it off, but I don’t feel no better. So I guess I’m beginnin’ to wonder: Maybe I can’t *ever* do enough good to balance the bad I done. Maybe I’ll always be worthless.”

“You can’t pay it off, Wayne,” Wax whispered. “That much is true.”

Wayne opened his eyes.

“Durkel, that man you killed,” Wax said, “he’s always going to be dead. Nothing you can do will change that. No number of good deeds will bring him back or earn you forgiveness.”

Wayne looked away, feeling sick—and not just because he was storin’ up health. “I know I said I didn’t need a speech, Wax. But I don’t know that you need to rub it in, neither.”

“Fortunately,” Wax said, “you don’t need forgiveness, Wayne.”

“Now that’s nonsense.”

“No it’s not.” Wax leaned forward, pointing with his bottle. “Wayne, would you do it again, if you had the chance? Rob a man for his pocket change? Shoot him when things get heated?”

“What? Of course not!”

“So,” Wax said, leaning back, “you don’t need forgiveness. Because *you* aren’t the man who killed Durkel. Not anymore. The man who did that, well, he’s dead. Buried beneath six feet of the clay and rock that passes for soil in the Roughs. You haven’t been him for years.”

“I don’t think it works that way,” Wayne said.

“Why not?” Wax replied, taking another pull on his beer. “What’s any of this for, if people can’t change? If there’s no chance for you, Wayne, there’s no chance for anyone. We might as well shoot a man the first time he does anything wrong, because hey … he’ll never change, so who cares?”

“That’s not fair.”

“You’re not fair,” Wax said, “to yourself. I’ve watched you, Wayne. You didn’t become my deputy because you wanted redemption. You don’t keep fighting alongside me because you need to be forgiven. You do it because of the man you’ve become. You do it because you want to make the world better.”

“Maybe you’re wrong,” Wayne said. “You don’t know what’s in my brain, Wax. Maybe I *am* corrupt, through and through. You know how I am when I get in a brawl. Maybe I’m doin’ all this to get a chance to fight and kill folks. Because I *like* it.”

“Nope,” Wax said. He finished off his beer, then held the bottle out, dangling between two fingers. “I don’t buy it, Wayne. I know you. And I *respect* you. Admire you. There are times I wish I could be as good a man as you are.”

Wayne sat up, squinting at him. “Wait. You’re serious?”

“Damn right.”

“Mate, I burned down a building today. And not one what you’re supposed to burn down, like a school. A big important building.”

“Yeah, and what did you do with that fire?” Wax asked. “Did you light it and run?”

Wayne shrugged.

“No, you got everyone out,” Wax said. “You specifically led a group of people knocking on doors to make sure everyone escaped. You lit the fire because you needed to, but then you made sure that…” He hesitated, double-checked his bottle was empty, then looked at Wayne with a frown. “Wayne. Schools aren’t *meant* to be burned down. Just because we did it once doesn’t mean it’s all right.”

“No, see,” Wayne said, finishing off his own beer, “I figured it out. Schools *is* meant to be burned down. Imagine you was a kid, and you woke up and found the school was plumb gone? Well damn, that’d be the best rusting day ever!”

Wax sighed.

“I figure,” Wayne continued, “that’s why the city keeps building more schools. Have you seen how many there are these days? The government is saving them up, in case they need to make some kids happy. Then they'll burn 'em down."

Wax eyed him. So Wayne smiled and winked, letting him know that this might have been an exaggerated-story-type thing.

Wax leaned back. "I can't tell with you sometimes…"

"That's the problem though, ain't it?" Wayne said. "Because I do terrible stuff! Ranette told me that Durkel girl—apparently, visiting her is the *worst* thing I coulda been doin'. I've been making her life awful all these years even without knowing it!"

"And you care?" Wax asked.

"Course I do!"

Wax inclined his head toward him. "Proof. You're a good person."

"Fat lot of good it does when I still mess everything up, mate. I still grab stuff sometimes, even when it's not my friend's and I ain't joking. I don't think about it until later. And I realize, maybe that fellow *liked* his cigar box."

"You mess up a lot less than you fix, Wayne. You can't deny it. You are a *good man.*"

Wayne fell quiet. Because … because he liked Wax. More, he trusted Wax. Wax was right about things.

Could he … be right about this?

Wax leaned forward. "You can't keep digging up the corpse of who you used to be, Wayne. You can't keep toting it around. Let him stay buried. Consider who you *are,* not who you left behind. That's what I've learned these last few years. It's made all the difference."

Huh. It was platitudes. Easy words to say. But Wax didn't just say things. He never had. Wax meant things.

Maybe … maybe it *was* time to bury that corpse. Because rusts, it was feelin' heavy lately. What would life be like if he weren't carryin' that thing? Maybe a part of him was ready, and had been for years. He'd stopped shakin' when he held a gun. His body was ready to move on. Could his mind allow it?

He scanned out over the city, his head pounding from storing health. Cars bustled below, representatives of a new world, with fancy new buildings throwing long shadows as the sun started to set. The whole Basin was changing.

Why not him with it?

He let himself stop storing up health. Truth was, it wouldn't do much. His head cleared, and his aches faded.

"Right, then," he said, sitting up. "We needta solve this thing, Wax. I've got this bad feeling—had it all day—that we're on a trail that is far, *far* too cold for comfort."

"Agreed," Wax said, pulling over two duffels. "Look through that. See what Steris packed us." He pushed over the first of them—his ammo pack, retrieved from a rooftop.

Wayne took it and undid the ties and zipper, while Wax dug in the other and took out some pages, holding them up. The billboard had some electric lights on it, to make the thing visible at night—which was good for readin'. Huh. Maybe Wax had a good reason for pickin' this spot after all.

Wayne began counting ammo for Wax's guns, setting it aside in little pouches. "So," he said, "they was testin' some flyin' bomb out in the ocean?"

"They were only testing the delivery device," Wax said, shuffling papers. "No bomb on it yet. That would be too dangerous. Plus, it wasn't ready yet. I've got schematics for the bomb here, and until recently they were having trouble creating a big enough battery to make it portable."

"But they figured that out?"

"Unfortunately," he said, handing a schematic over—as if Wayne would have any use for it. "Look there. Finally have it working, portable but *large*. That's what's giving them such a headache. They have these rockets that can fly a good thirty or forty miles, but not with such a huge payload." He shuffled more pages, then handed another over. "This schematic is a dead man's switch. An extremely pernicious one. They don't want anyone disarming the thing. And here, a design for a much larger rocket. Maybe a last chance at making this work, but they're worried it won't fly far enough … and might catch Bilming or other towns and not just Elendel."

Wayne grunted, tucking the pages in his pocket. Then, digging further into his own duffel, he found a sandwich.

“Hot damn,” he said, unwrapping it. Pastrami? Hot *double* damn. “Good thing you ignored me and stayed with that woman. She’s quite a catch.”

Wax gave him a flat look.

“I was wrong about her, all right?” Wayne said, digging out a second sandwich and tossing it to Wax. “I’m wrong about people a lot. Maybe even myself.”

Wax smiled, then dug into the sandwich. Wayne did the same, and he hadn’t realized how hungry he was. Some canteens followed—alas, just water. He wished for another beer. But no, they had work to do. One would keep them limber. Any more would be dangerous.

Wayne dug out a replacement metalmind for Wax, filled with extra weight, and tossed it to him. Next were some vials filled with metal flakes, all in a little sheath. Eight of them had been removed already; eight remained. “These ain’t your normal sort.”

“Harmony sent them,” Wax said. “Said they were special.”

“Did he now…” Wayne said, eyeing the last one in line, with a red cork. He set those aside, then took out a small pouch of metals with his name on it. Rusting woman had even sent him some bendalloy. “So, where do we go, Wax? You said they were buildin’ one final rocket, biggest of them all. Where do we find it?”

Wax scanned the notes. “They’re worried, Wayne. Up against the wall. There’s notations at the end here, from today. They are *terrified* that Autonomy will cancel their whole project—violently. So they’re scrambling to fend us off, and for any last chance at victory. But where … how…”

Wayne continued fishing in his duffel, then pulled out a strange wicker ball with a weight at the center. “Is this something Ranette made?”

Wax grinned, waving for Wayne to toss it over. Then Wax launched it into the air with a Steelpush. “Max must have helped Steris pack. Sent me a little gift.” He launched it higher next time. Then higher.

Then he caught it and froze.

“What?” Wayne said.

“I know where the bomb is,” Wax said. “You need height. Height first, then you can launch something far. Plus, they needed to build a big rocket someplace where people wouldn't be able to poke around. Get as much height as they can, in a secure location…"

Wayne breathed out, and the two of them turned toward the center of the city. And the Shaw, the enormous tower there—which had new construction on top, supposedly adding a few new floors. Or was it a different construction project entirely?

"Damn," Wayne said, noting the number of lights on in the upper floors of the tower, and the floodlights on the top. "They're busy tonight. Backs against the wall indeed…" He looked to Wax. "It's a mesa. That spire. *That's* the mesa."

"What mesa?"

"In my ma's story," Wayne said, "it all ended at the mesa. The lone peak in the center of a flat landscape."

Wayne eyed his friend to see if he complained they weren't in that story. Because in this, Wax would be wrong. They *were* in it—or at least living alongside it. Because Wayne had decided it was so, and that was the way of things.

"A mesa, eh?" Wax said, letting one leg slip out over the edge to dangle. "Yeah, I can see that."

"I could never figure out the part that happened next," Wayne said. "In the story, the lawman went to the mesa to find the bad guy—Blatant Barm, worst villain there ever was. But Barm *was* the mesa."

"He … was the *mesa*?"

"Yeah, like he'd transformed into it," Wayne said.

"That … doesn't make much sense."

"Sure doesn't," Wayne said. "I never could figure out why Ma told it that way."

"Maybe it doesn't mean anything," Wax said. "Maybe she came up with it because something needs to happen in stories."

"Nah," Wayne said. "You didn't know my ma, Wax. She was *good* at stories. Real good. It meant somethin'…" Wayne took a deep breath. "If we've gotta get to the top, that's gonna be a *rough* ascent. There aren't any other buildings around it nearly as tall. You won't be able to Push us up there."

“We’d be exposed to snipers trying that anyway,” Wax said, squinting at the floodlights high atop the Shaw. “We’ll have to go up the inside … Ruin, Wayne. You’re right. It’s going to be rough.”

Wayne’s foot thumped against something from the ammo duffel. He frowned, then knelt and pulled out a wooden box that had been tucked at the bottom. It had Ranette’s symbol on the top.

Wax breathed out softly, almost reverently. “Steris packed it.”

“What?” Wayne said, opening the top.

He revealed a gun. Stocky, with a barrel a good *four inches* across. Unlike anything he’d ever seen.

“Something special.” Wax took it out, then removed other pieces from the box to assemble something that looked a bit like a single-barrel shotgun, only with a much wider bore. It had a big central ammo wheel—almost like for an oversized revolver—which held slugs bigger than shot glasses.

Wayne whistled.

“We just call it the Big Gun,” Wax said. “I’d hoped I wouldn’t need it. It wasn’t built for a lawman. It was built … for a sword.”

In the distance, the sun finally sank beneath the ocean horizon, like a great big piece a’ dough bein’ dropped in to be fried up nice and toasty. Wayne held his breath. Then mists began to curl in the air. Growing like vines from invisible holes, pouring out into the city.

“Well,” Wax whispered, “that’s a welcome sight.” He glanced at the gun in his hands. “This next part is going to be bloody, Wayne. How much healing do you have left?”

“Not much,” Wayne admitted. “I can handle a bullet or two. That’s it.”

Wax took a deep breath. “I’ll want you to stay back. To let me do what Harmony has decided I need to do.” He cocked the strange gun, chambering an enormous bullet. “We’re going to get to the top of that building and stop the launch.” He paused. “Funny. I don’t know if I could have done this a few years ago. But I know who I am, what I’m fighting for, and why. There’s a certain peace in that, no matter how bad this is likely to get.”

“Rusts,” Wayne said, his stomach in a knot. “Wish I felt the same. Wax, after all this time, it’s still hard for me to sort out. I kill a man, and it ruins my life. Then I join you, and I've gotta keep killin' them. Poor sods. You know?"

Wax shouldered the strange gun, then put his hand on Wayne's arm. "Yeah. I know. But maybe your ma was right about the bad guy being a mesa. Being the *land itself.* Maybe that's what she was saying, Wayne: It's the world that we have to worry about. Individual men, yes, they can be evil. But we should worry *more* about the world itself making them so."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Wax said, "do you think you'd have fallen in with the Plank Boys if your mother hadn't died in that accident?"

"Absolutely not," Wayne said.

"Nearly every man I've had to shoot? He had a story like yours. It's the sort of thing Marasi is always talking about. You have to stop the Blatant Barms of the world, yes. But if you can create a world where fewer boys grow up alone … well, maybe you'll have far fewer Blatant Barms to face in the future. Maybe that was what your mother was saying."

Huh. "Yeah," Wayne said. "Yeah, that sounds right." He stood at the edge of the billboard ledge, the two of them facing the spire. Wax slid the last of those metal vials Harmony had given him into the aluminum-lined sheath at his belt. Wayne downed some himself.

"Wayne," Wax said, "do you remember how this started? This new life, after the Roughs? I'd given up after Lessie's death. You came to me in Elendel, and *you* pulled me out, Wayne. I was content to sit around, stewing in my own self-reflection. Then you showed up and grabbed me. Told me there were train cars being robbed mysteriously. Set me on the path chasing Trell…"

"I suppose," Wayne said. "Doesn't mean I'm the hero."

"Nonsense." Wax glanced at him. "This is who you are. No amount of complaining, no phantom guilt, no whispering lying voice that says otherwise is going to change that. 'You're meant to be helping people,' Wayne. 'It's what you do.'"

Wayne cocked his head. "Was that … a quote or somethin'?"

"It's what you said to me seven years ago. When people needed me, but I was too afraid to pick up a gun."

“You *remember* that?” Wayne said. “The exact things I said?”

“Of course I do. Those words changed my life.”

Wayne let out a howl of laughter. “Damn, Wax. I just *say things*! You’re not supposed to actually pay *attention* to them!”

“It was meaningful!”

“Ha. Listening to *me.* Might as well write the stuff I say on a plaque or something. ‘You’re meant to be helping people. Also, remember—ain’t no fellow who regretted giving it one extra shake, but you can bet every guy has regretted giving one too few.’”

They shared a look as the mists began to curl around them, headlights illuminating the roadway beneath like a river of light running toward the Shaw. Then they both nodded.

“You ready for this?” Wax asked.

“Let’s do it,” Wayne replied.

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Armal and her nervous little collection of townspeople insisted on taking Marasi together. They hurried along a “back road” of Wayfarer—a path lined with fake trees, simulating a park.

It worked. The Set’s “tranquility officers” started a door-to-door search behind them—along the main road—but had to maintain the illusion of being a friendly neighborhood watch. This promenade gave Marasi cover, letting her slip past.

Entrone’s home—constructed over the last year—was so large that she sensed resentment from the others. He should have been smart enough to keep it modest; he likely didn’t spend much time in it. But the man’s ego apparently demanded something ostentatious—including a third floor with large picture windows on all sides. As they approached, Marasi decided it was probably just another observation center. Maybe with a few false rooms at the front to keep up appearances.

“All right,” Marasi said to Armal and the others, “think about what I’ve said. Please.”

They huddled among the fake trees and bushes. Rusts. Marasi wasn’t certain they’d be of much help. All the same, she hurried to the building—which was on a small stone hill.

She was spotted by people gathering outside their townhomes, in deliberate defiance of Entrone’s orders. Some pointed. Well, the time for sneaking was gone anyway. Feeling alone, Marasi used Moonlight’s picks to undo the lock on the mansion’s back door, then slipped in. She passed through a kitchen that seemed a little too clean and quickly found another door, held shut with several deadbolts. Right, then. She wasn't getting through that with picks.

She took a deep breath. There was so much that could go wrong with her plan. But she was out of resources and out of time; once in a while you just had to do things Wayne's way.

She attached one of Moonlight's explosives to the door, took cover behind a cabinet, then blasted the thing off. A second later she burst through the smoking doorway, pistol ready. The two people in here had ducked to the floor at the explosion, though the small charge—intended for this kind of use—hadn't done much damage to the room. They had been monitoring some radio equipment. A closed door on the other side of the room led farther into the building, and a strange glowing light came from beneath it.

"Down," Marasi said, her gun trained on the radio operators. The two didn't look armed, and they hastened to comply.

Radio equipment. Marasi crossed the room, hauled the woman to her feet, then gestured to the equipment. "This broadcasts to the town? Through these microphones?"

"Y-yes," the woman said.

"Turn them on," Marasi ordered.

The woman hurriedly flicked some switches. Then Marasi sent the two technicians outside and trapped them in a slowness bubble from a charged grenade. She didn't have time to do more.

When she returned to the radio room, the door on the far end had opened and people were entering to see what the ruckus was about. And rusts, one of them was Entrone himself, appearing weary, bags under his eyes, wan complexion making him look like a corpse dressed for a funeral in his fine suit and formal hat.

The room behind him glowed with a white light. Marasi glimpsed a large chamber with a white floor—the source of the light—but she didn't have time to study it now. Instead she leveled her gun at Entrone, but his bodyguards immediately stepped in front of him.

"I told you, gentlemen," Entrone said from behind them. "The rat we've been hunting doesn't hide in the dark. Wait long enough, and it will come to you.”

“By the authority of the Elendel Constabulary,” Marasi said, “I order you to lay down arms and metals, then submit to arrest.”

Entrone sighed in a long-suffering way, like a man who had just been given a bedtime ultimatum by his three-year-old. So Marasi fired. She dropped one of the bodyguards, but the other returned fire.

Marasi ducked back into the kitchen, narrowly avoiding the shots. “Think about this, Entrone!” Marasi called into the room. “Are you really prepared to kill so many? Can anything be *worth* such a terrible act?”

He didn’t respond. Rusts. She’d hoped to get him talking. She exchanged a few more shots with the remaining bodyguard, then reloaded.

As she did, she heard footsteps. Dodging back by reflex, she narrowly escaped getting caught in a slowness bubble. Not made by her, but one that had extended through the wall. She could pick it out by the faint shimmering of the air.

She peeked through and saw the bodyguard frozen in a slowness bubble just inside the doorway. Entrone was safely beyond it. But how…?

That bodyguard shares my Allomantic power, she realized. *He was trying to catch me in the bubble, but put it up a hair too slowly.* If she hadn’t dodged, she’d be trapped in that bubble with him while time sped up around them. Giving Entrone plenty of time to get reinforcements.

It was a tactic she had employed herself on several occasions. It chilled her to realize she’d nearly been caught in it. The slowness bubble took up a chunk of the kitchen and most of the doorway into the radio room.

Entrone paced, separated from her by that slowed time. Gunfire would be useless; they could only glare at one another. She didn’t have a good angle to see into the room beyond him, but that glow … it reminded her of something.

Entrone settled down in a nearby chair.

“Why, Entrone?” Marasi asked. “Why lock all these people away like this? Why pretend the world has ended?” With that corner of the doorway not caught in the bubble, her voice should be able to reach him. Unfortunately, he refused to take the bait, instead simply leaning back in his chair.

Maybe I'm approaching this wrong, Marasi thought. *He's not going to volunteer anything. But what if he thought he was the one getting information out of me?*

"Wax and Wayne have stopped the launch," Marasi lied, taking a risk. "Elendel is safe. You're trapped, and soon this place will be flooded with constables."

Entrone didn't laugh at her immediately, which was a good sign. She hoped he'd try to pry for more information.

"That's nonsense of course," he said. "It—"

Then he stopped. Because his voice echoed outside the building, projected into the city. He glanced at the radio and saw it was on. He gave her a dry look.

"I think," he continued, "you are seriously ash-sick, young woman. Please, let us help you."

Then he reached over and flipped off the radio.

Damn.

"Clever," he said to her. "But what do you think would happen if those in the Community knew the truth? They're a bunch of cowed civilians. They've been imprisoned here for seven years, never knowing the truth. Never caring to know it. You really think they'd help you?"

Marasi winced. So much for that plan.

The guard remained frozen in place between them. Eventually he'd realize he hadn't caught her, and would drop his bubble. But that could take time, inside one of those. She knew how that felt.

"Entrone," she said, "you don't have to go through with this."

"With what, exactly?" he said.

"You're going to open a portal to let Autonomy's army begin an invasion of our world. I know the plan."

He grunted, then slumped forward further. He was still slime—the way he'd casually ordered the execution of those captives had proved it—but he was also obviously burdened by events. Perhaps she could shake his conviction.

"Why?" she asked, genuinely curious. "You know they're here not to rule, but destroy. Lay waste."

“Because if I don’t,” he said, “she’ll send them anyway—and then I’ll be one of the ones who gets killed. We can’t fight them. They’ll annihilate our forces.”

“Will they?” Marasi said. “From what I hear, Autonomy is frightened of us. Worried we’ll outpace her people technologically. If she could destroy us easily, she’d have done it already, right?”

“It takes special circumstances to create one of these portals,” he said. “Even for her. Can’t just be anywhere, or anytime.” He turned, looking over his shoulder. “The timing gave us a deadline.”

Rusts. That room behind him … that was where the portal would open, wasn’t it? She’d assumed there would be some kind of gateway, but it was the ground that was glowing. Rusts … maybe he hadn’t wanted a big mansion out of pride. Maybe they’d built it here to hide the fact that the portal, whatever it was, would appear here.

“The location…” he said, turning back. “I think it’s because of those people, oddly. Such a large collection of Metalborn. And we were required to bring in a strange power, a glowing light. That’s part of the key.”

“But—”

“Are you a Survivorist, constable?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said.

“Then you know our prime tenet,” he said, looking up and meeting her eyes. “The one we’re taught from childhood?”

“Survive,” she whispered.

He nodded.

“Not like this,” she said. “Not at the expense of others. Kelsier didn’t give up without a fight. He didn’t simply go with what the Lord Ruler demanded. He taught us to survive *despite* obstacles. Not to let ourselves be slowly crushed so we could gain a minute or two of extra breath.”

“Interpret it how you wish, constable,” Entrone said, rubbing his brow. “I think these troops will come even if Telsin is successful … to *help* oversee us, in this new world. One where we serve Autonomy.”

“That’s an excuse,” Marasi said. “Worse, it’s cowardice. You’re the mayor of this city. Your duty is to the people, Entrone.”

He laughed, standing up. “You can’t possibly be that idealistic.”

She blushed.

Was she?

Yes, she was. And proud of it.

I have to find a way to close that portal, she thought, looking through the bubble of slowed time toward the room with the light. Again she thought it seemed familiar. White, with a mother-of-pearl sheen. Yes. It was like the pure Investiture from Moonlight's jars. The floor had been dug out, then filled up with the stuff, making a kind of pool in a recessed portion of the ground.

"A great deal of power in one place…" she said. Allik always said that you weren't supposed to store too much harmonium in one place, or "strange things happen, yah?" He didn't know what those things were. But Marasi swore she could make out a warping of the air in that room. That liquid was somehow powering the portal.

Entrone had stepped up to the faintly visible barrier of the slowness bubble. It was smaller than the ones Marasi made, closer to the size of Wayne's bubbles. Entrone shook his head at the trapped guard.

"You're like him, if I recall," Entrone said, walking to the side. "A Pulser—capable of making bubbles of slowed time."

Marasi didn't respond. Entrone strolled sideways, near the wall separating the radio room from the kitchen, where she couldn't see him through the doorway anymore. The bubble filled most of the radio room, but there were some portions at the edges that weren't touched by it. His voice continued a moment later.

"Do you ever feel," he said, "embarrassed by your useless power, constable? I know your sister is an embarrassment to your father. But at least he *acknowledged* her."

He had done his research; a few years back, that barb might have bothered her. Now Marasi recognized it for what it was—an attempt to put her off balance. She focused on the glowing pool. The surface was beginning to ripple. Was there another way into the—

At that moment, Entrone ripped through the wall itself, circumventing the slowness bubble. Rusts! He'd sounded so worn out that Marasi had nearly discounted him. Now he crashed through the wood, shattering beams like they were twigs.

Marasi shot him in the chest, but the wounds *healed* immediately. Faster than Wayne's did. He gave her a grim smile.

Marasi unloaded the entire magazine into him, and did little more than poke a few holes in his suit. He grabbed her by the front of her shirt and lifted her. Dust from the drywall streamed from his clothing as he pulled her right up to his face. Still in his grip, Marasi hit him on the side of the head with the butt of her pistol. He just grinned. She did manage to knock his hat off though.

"I'm a god now, little bastard," he said to her. "What strength do you have to stand against me? Your Allomancy? Pathetic. Your weapons? Laughable. You have no power to threaten me."

He turned and threw her out the window with a crash, back into the main cavern.

It *hurt.* A sharp blinding pain all across her body. Cuts and slices, followed by a dizzying hit to her head and shoulder as she slowed and stopped in a heap. Through teary eyes, through the pain, she saw his shape—shadowy to her vision—climbing out the window after her.

"The army is coming," he said, his voice growing softer as he stalked forward, his nice coat disheveled. "I imagined I'd be some grand lord, ruling in a new world. But I guess … I guess … we all have to do what we must to survive."

He reached for her. She tried to pull back, noting another group of shapes stepping out from the shadows outside the building. Had Armal and the others followed her up to the mansion?

She had hoped they would overhear Entrone admitting the truth via the radio. But perhaps … perhaps they'd been close enough, in their curiosity, to hear him speak now …

Please, please *have heard him.*

Gave Entrone loomed over her.

"You're right about my powers," Marasi said with a cough. "I've found uses for them. But they aren't where my strength comes from. Not really."

He grabbed her.

“My strength,” she whispered, “never came from Allomancy. Rusts … I learned that lesson as a child. It doesn’t come from weapons, or even the credentials I carry.”

Please …

Entrone raised her into the air as a distinct *clink* sounded. He froze, then turned to see Armal. The source of the sound was a jar she’d dropped to the ground. Once full of light. Now empty.

A replacement for metal, Moonlight had said. But supercharged.

“I’m a constable, Entrone,” Marasi whispered. “My strength isn’t in myself. It comes from the people.”

A Rioting, with the power of a thousand Allomancers, hit their emotions like a physical wave of force.

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Shame hit Marasi like a wave.

The Rioter's art. Pick an emotion, then blast it into a person on full automatic. It was easier for emotional Allomancers to target their powers in a direction instead of at a specific individual.

It caught Entrone, judging by his stumble, but it also *pounded* Marasi with a sense of worthlessness. A sure knowledge of her own irrelevance and insignificance. Memories bubbled out from her soul: times she'd failed, times she'd fallen short. Had she ever *not* failed? Had she ever *not* been worthless?

She'd spent her childhood hidden away by a father who was embarrassed by her. She'd spent her youth dreaming of far-off legends, only to make an utter fool of herself when one of those legends walked into her life. Though Marasi's romantic feelings for Wax were long since abandoned, the shame of how she'd thrown herself at him—to be rebuffed—was oppressive.

She gasped, rolling to her knees, head bowed, with drips of blood from a slice on her scalp trickling down her cheek.

She was *nothing*. She'd *always* been nothing.

Wax let her join him because he felt bad for her. She'd lived in his shadow for years. Unable to find her own constable partner, so she'd needed to borrow his. Unable to solve important cases without his help.

The weight of it smothered her, reminding her of everything she was not. And everything she would never be. And …

And it was nothing new.

She'd felt it all before. Less powerfully, yes, but none of this was novel. She'd lived with some of these fears for her entire life. Others she'd pushed through during her professional years. They were illogical.

Logic didn't matter. Just emotion. But she could handle that emotion. She took a deep breath, whispered that it would soon pass, and shouldered it.

She could weather this.

Entrone wasn't so capable. He curled up on the green-painted stone patio and whimpered softly. All the regeneration powers in the world wouldn't help if he couldn't move—and without his aluminum-lined hat he was completely subject to Armal's control.

Some soldiers came running up, but one of the other townspeople dealt with them using what appeared to be a Soothing. It seemed that Armal had spread the Investiture around as Marasi had suggested.

Ultimately, the plan had worked. Marasi had succeeded in her primary job: empowering the people. She could rest now, and ride out the Rioting.

Except …

Except that portal was still opening. The invasion force was still coming.

This worry—narrow, focused, cutting through her shame like a knife—drove Marasi to focus. Because Marasi …

Marasi *could* function.

She began moving, feeling as if she were crawling away from it: her pain, her sorrow, her shame. With each grueling inch, she felt herself growing stronger. Shrugging off those lies. Embracing the person she'd become. A woman who didn't care whose shadow she stood in—as long as the job got done. A woman who didn't care if her father, or society, was ashamed of her—as long as she was confident in herself.

A woman who could, painfully but determinedly, pass Entrone huddled on the floor. And—with a breath of relief—get outside the directional force of Armal's Rioting. The emotions vanished like smoke on a windy day. Marasi breathed out a long sigh, but there was no time to relax.

“Be careful,” she said to one of the others as they came up to her. “Entrone is Metalborn. He can heal and has incredible strength.”

Marasi wasn’t certain how long Armal’s power would last, but it seemed that she’d been granted exceptional abilities—like when Vin had drawn in the mists, as recorded in scripture.

Rusts. Could that glowing light be the body of a god, just like the mists had been? Marasi limped back into the mansion. She ignored the frozen guard. For him, this would all have passed in seconds. Perhaps he was still responding to her dodging out of the way of his bubble— or maybe Entrone had just ordered him to block the doorway.

Fortunately, the lord mayor had ripped her a new path. She pushed through the broken remnants of the wall, limped past the radio station, and stumbled up to the portal doorway. Most of the mansion, it turned out, was a sham. The vast majority of the space was taken up by this one room with the glowing floor. Radiant light had been poured into a pool twenty feet wide, and it was beginning to churn. Glowing brightly. Lighting the walls a ghostly white.

She didn’t have to think hard to grasp the mythological implications of this place. Rusts. That was raw, concentrated power. A single jar had given TwinSoul the power to create a stone body twelve feet tall, a second had transformed Moonlight into another person, and a third had given Armal the power to Riot emotions like the Lord Ruler himself.

This pool had to hold thousands of jars’ worth of the power. She stepped forward, then felt the most awful premonition: she was close enough that she *saw* them, in a place with a dark sky and misty ground. Thousands of inhuman soldiers with golden skin and glowing red eyes. Living statues. They carried rifles of an advanced design, and their stares seemed to bore holes in her mind. The men of gold and red had arrived. Bearers of the final metal, Miles had called them. Destroyers.

Marasi stumbled back from the pool, daunted, as the pains of the fight started to flare up; the bruises and cuts from being thrown by Entrone.

But before the call of that power, her pain seemed distant. Inconsequential. Once upon a time, she’d given up the Bands of Mourning. She didn’t need to hold power like that.

Today, she realized something else. She didn't need power like that, but duty wasn't about what you needed. It was about what was needed from you.

Centuries ago, the Last Emperor Elend Venture had been faced with a similar problem: how to dispose of a great deal of power. She knew what she needed to do.

A second later, she burst out of the building to find the clustered men and women of the Community speaking with the guards—calming them. Armal had finished tying up Entrone. He struggled, but strangely was unable to break free.

"Macil is a Leecher," Armal said, gesturing to one of the nearby women. "He might be able to heal, but we've sucked the strength out of him."

Marasi nodded, teeth gritted against the pain and the echoes of the Rioting she'd survived. "I need every Allomancer in this cavern gathered here, *right now.*"

"Why?" Armal said, walking up to her.

"There's a well of power in the room nearby, and it's opening a portal to something terrible," Marasi said. "We're going to stop it the old-fashioned way. By burning up all of the power with our abilities."

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With Wayne clinging to his back, Wax bounded across the city to the Shaw. He made one last jump from the top of a nearby skyscraper—one that was half as high as the Shaw—and launched them toward destiny, mists curling in their passing.

There were some balconies over halfway up the tower, just inside a strong Coinshot's reach. If the enemy had any measure of foresight, they'd be ready for incursions at those locations. They were still his best choice. The higher he got, the less ground he'd need to cover inside, where he'd likely have to fight for every inch.

Wax angled them toward a wide balcony with two broad, dark windows looking into the structure. Wax's Push—the anchor too far away—was barely enough to get them to it, and they landed lightly amid some small planters.

"Aw…" Wayne said, dropping off his back. "We was supposed to go smashing through that glass! All dramatic-like!"

"That's an excellent way to get cut to shreds," Wax said, ducking to the side—out of sight of those windows. "I can't heal. You can barely heal. And there's a door *right there.*"

"The Ascendant Warrior did it," Wayne grumbled.

"When?"

"Right before killin' the Lord Ruler."

"Since when have you known that sort of thing?"

"It's in a little kids' book that Max and I read sometimes," he said. "Right about my level."

Wax tried the door in the wall to the left of the large windows, but it was locked. "Assassinating the Lord Ruler?" Wax asked. "Isn't that a little violent for a children's book?"

"Mate," Wayne said, "it ain't *violence* if it's *religion.* Don't you know anythin'?"

"Apparently not," Wax said. "I—"

He cut off as floodlights turned on in the room beyond, shining through the windows with blazing intensity. Wax pulled up against the wall, Wayne next to him. He dared a glance inside, and saw figures behind and between the lights, their silhouettes raising weapons.

Gunfire cracked like thunder, shattering the window.

"Damn," Wayne said as the gunfire tapered off. "Those are *soldiers,* mate. I came down here to the Basin all those years ago 'cuz of a cute little case involvin' train cars what got robbed in a funny way. How in Ruin's own name did I end up getting mixed up with dark gods, armies, bombs destroyin' cities, and … and *ghosts,* Wax. We still ain't talked about the *ghosts.*"

Wax unhooked the Big Gun from inside his coat, where he carried larger weapons while flying. "Can you keep their attention while I try to flank them?"

Wayne smiled. "Scary Tree? We could do Scary Tree!"

"Do you have enough health stored for Scary Tree?"

"Mate, I don't need health for Scary Tree," Wayne said. "Just you watch."

Wax nodded, whipping off his mistcoat and handing it to Wayne along with a spare gun—which Wayne took with a shocking level of calm. Usually they needed to throw some bullets in the fire or something to do Scary Tree.

Wayne proceeded to shoot the weapon from beside the window into the room beyond—mistcoat tassels waving—persuading everyone he was Wax. Wayne even did some eerily impressive vocal imitation.

People fixated upon Wax. They had tunnel vision about fighting the infamous lawman Coinshot. It was even worse these days—where news of his exploits had been exaggerated by the broadsheets. He supposed that finding and using the Bands of Mourning themselves hadn't hurt his reputation.

While everyone was distracted by Wayne, Wax unlocked the door with a quick Push from the side on the deadbolt. When he'd glanced in through the window earlier, he'd noticed that a wall separated the room with the soldiers from wherever this door led. On cracking it open, he found a small hallway.

If he guessed right, their enemies would soon use this hallway to try reaching the balcony. So he slipped inside and Pushed himself up to the ceiling directly above the door on the other side. He held there, using nails in the floor. As anticipated, a small group of armed men snuck into the darkened hallway, light from the floodlights in the room beyond spilling in around them. Blinding them.

In the old days, Allomancers—Mistborn in particular—had been regarded like shadows. Or the mists themselves. Silent, hidden, practically formless. Wax could well understand the origins of those myths as the three soldiers passed underneath him in a tight cluster. He dropped and disposed of them the old-fashioned way: a few coins flung in the air, delivered noiselessly into their brains from behind. No crack of gunfire. No shouts of pain. Just the thump of bodies on the floor.

They'd left the door open, and he peeked into the main room. Those floodlights had been prepared for this and could move on wheels. Likely they'd had scouts watching for Wax bounding over the buildings below, and positioned their ambush where they thought he'd enter.

Wayne's distraction was working well. The soldiers had pushed the floodlights into a line across the middle of the room and were arrayed in the gaps between them, shooting aluminum bullets.

As Wayne had noted, these people weren't like the common street criminals Wax and Wayne had fought earlier in the day, with their rough clothing, mismatched and rugged gear. These wore red uniforms and carried sleek weapons—modern rifles. They knelt with precise postures, firing carefully. Several were slipping forward along the left side of the room to get an angle on Wayne.

Unfortunately for them, they weren’t watching their own flanks. And while aluminum guns might not be affected by Steelpushes, the enormous floodlights were. Tapping weight to make himself sturdier, Wax Pushed into the room, smashing the lights into one another—and crushing the soldiers who had set up between them.

He crashed all of this into a mess against the far wall, then decreased his weight and slid across the ground, using nails in the wall behind as an anchor. On the other side of the room, he positioned himself and Pushed again, sending some of the wreckage sweeping outward to catch the remaining soldiers—and sending them and the broken lights out the window into the mists.

A moment later, Wayne sauntered into the now-darker room and tossed Wax his mistcoat. “Sorry for the bullet holes.”

“A few holes won’t…” Wax said, then noticed—in the weak light of the room’s flickering ceiling light—that there had to be at *least* sixteen holes in it, even in some of the tassels. “How did you not get shot?”

“By not bein’ where the bullets was,” Wayne said.

Wax threw on the mistcoat duster. He had three guns on him. The Big Gun in his left hand. The Steel Survivor, aluminum but loaded with normal lead slugs. And Vindication, with aluminum bullets in the ordinary chambers and two hazekiller rounds ready for dealing with Metalborn.

“We’re really going up the inside?” Wayne said.

Wax nodded. They would need proper climbing equipment to scale the outside, even if there weren’t Set sharpshooters around.

Wayne pulled out a dueling cane. Wax met his eyes and shook his head.

“But—” Wayne said.

“Harmony knew,” Wax said softly. “He knew what I’d need to become.”

It seemed he had a moment to pause, though more enemies would undoubtedly be on the way. So he reached into his pocket and took out a small sliver of metal. He slipped it into his ear, then carefully—ritualistically—checked Vindication’s chambers to be certain there was a round in each.

As before, he felt a faint disconnect from the trellium earring. But he didn't see visions. He felt Telsin's attention come on him, and heard—faintly—what she was doing. Giving orders. Sounding frantic.

She was above. At the top. He could *feel* it.

Waxillium, she said in his mind. *You should have left the city as I suggested*.

He clicked to the next chamber of his gun. "I have come," he said, "to clean up our family's mess."

Very dramatic, she said. *You—*

"Don't make me do this. Don't force it, Telsin."

She didn't reply at first. The only sound was that of him clicking, chamber to chamber.

You are still just a frightened child, Waxillium, she said. *All these years later, and you still can't take a risk. Can't see beyond your own limited mindset. I'm going to become something* incredible.

"I'll see you dead first," Wax said softly.

Wax, she said, *you're thirty floors away from me—and there are hundreds of soldiers from the Hidden Guard between us. My best. Reserved to stop you here*.

He snapped Vindication closed.

Oh, Wax, she said. *You have never understood. You can't beat me. You've* never *had the vision for that. Whatever you try, I'll always be ahead of you*.

He slipped Vindication into a holster, then downed an extra vial of steel—one of the ones Harmony had sent him. Finally, he hefted the Big Gun in one hand. Ranette had warned him what it was capable of doing. So he put up his steel bubble, even though the enemy was armed with aluminum.

"Funny, Telsin," he said, "that you claim to be the one with vision—when you've always underestimated me. If you'd *actually* had foresight, you'd have killed me when I first came back to the city seven years ago."

Before you could learn what I was doing?

"Before I came to love the things you're seeking to destroy."

He ripped the earring out and tossed it aside, then walked into the hallway and looked inward, toward where it ended at a cross hall. Footsteps and calls sounded from beyond a doorway there marked STAIRS. They went silent a moment later.

“Mate,” Wayne said, stepping up. “You’re sure about this?”

Wax raised his gun in two hands and strode forward. “Stay behind. Follow once I’m done. But don’t engage. It’s time for Harmony’s Sword to do his job.”

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Wax strode toward the stairwell and slipped out the Steel Survivor, loaded with ordinary lead bullets. He shot—then Pushed—twice, drilling a bullet through the wood on either side of the door. He was rewarded with shouts of pain from soldiers hiding within.

Telsin assumed that if she stuffed enough soldiers between them, it would slow him. But Wax was a Coinshot. The more you put between him and his goal, the more debris you gave him to turn into weapons.

He ripped a fire extinguisher off the wall next to him, then tossed it and Pushed it forward—his weight increased—and ripped the door to the stairwell off the hinges, slamming it against the men hiding inside. Predictably, several others ducked through the opening to try shooting him. He downed them each with a bullet to the head.

Then he shot the fire extinguisher, blasting white smoke and chemicals into the chamber. Finally, he lowered the Big Gun in his left hand and launched a shot. The massive explosive shell detonated amid the white smoke, spraying shrapnel through the hallway and out around Wax—where his steel bubble Pushed it away. He strode through the storm of steel untouched.

It was a gun built just for him: a grenade launcher designed for maximum shrapnel. And those it didn't kill, it would outline. Wax stormed through the doorway, tracing the lines of steelsight across the chaotic space, and downed shadows that tried to aim at him through the smoke.

Looking up through the smoke, he found a modern skyscraper stairwell. A straight shot to the top, assuming he could get past all the troops. Men and women fell on the steps as his gun flashed. Like those he'd faced before, these were dressed in sleek uniforms and didn't carry a trace of metal on them. But Wax had plenty to work with regardless. The stairwell had a metal banister and wrapped around itself, leaving a hole up the center. He almost flew straight up it, but he couldn't afford to leave enemies at his back. Plus he needed to carve a path for Wayne.

So, Wax launched a grenade up through the center of the stairwell, which detonated in another hail of shrapnel and screams. He launched upward, then Pushed outward, forcing the metal banister out and away from him in a circle, pinning it to the wall—and taking any people still standing with it. Indiscriminate firing started from above, so he dropped back down, narrowly avoiding aluminum bullet hail. Another grenade—fired up through the gap and detonated in exactly the right position by a careful Push—made them curse and stop.

He dashed upward, keeping his momentum, and Pushed off a fuse box, then a metal sign indicating the floor number. Sweeping up the steps, firing—yes—but just as often using chunks of metal debris as weapons. Grim, he advanced, never touching down, building a wall of metal—bullet casings, shrapnel, debris—ahead of him as he continued to Push, constantly repositioning, soaring up the stairs and bounding over corpses.

Once, Wax had run from his calling. He'd seen a duty that required him to not just find answers, not just solve problems, but to become something terrible. Something that Harmony—manacled by the powers of Preservation—couldn't do himself.

Tonight Waxillium embraced that duty. He became destruction incarnate. For to worship Harmony was not only to worship Preservation—it was also to worship Ruin, with all that implied. There were times for careful caution and empathy. And there were times when people pointed a weapon capable of killing millions straight at his home, his family, his constituents.

Wax ascended the stairwell as a tempest, constantly seeking upward. Toward the false heaven of a monstrous god. And as he did, he noticed mist trickling down the steps—there was a small vent to the outside on each floor. Enough for Harmony's blood to spill in. It rarely came indoors, but it coated the steps tonight like a ghostly liquid.

Metal plinged. Metal he couldn't see. He ducked back by instinct—and a second later another explosion shook the stairwell. He found himself bleeding from shrapnel along one arm; they'd found grenades of their own. But as the resistance pressed forward to stop him, they found him still quite hale.

Vindication aimed true, dispatching aluminum death. The enemy bunched up with wooden shields and furniture to block his way, but Wax lobbed a grenade into it, then used the wood—now embedded with steel fragments—and a Push to force them back. When they went down, Wax landed behind the barricade and heard calls from above, giving him time to reload the Big Gun with another six grenades. He locked the weapon closed, then gritted his teeth.

These soldiers might have thought themselves prepared. They might even have fought Coinshots before.

But they'd never fought Waxillium Ladrian.

He had to take another hit of steel as he advanced. He was using it faster than he expected. He dropped the vial as shouts above accompanied soldiers throwing lines and nets across the central column to prevent him from flying up.

Wax pressed on, relentless. Heavy as a truck at some times, light as a bullet at others, he drove himself upward. Allomancy made the stairwell tremble—the concrete was reinforced with steel he could sense and use. It bent beneath his will, the concrete cracking, stairs rupturing and throwing off the aim of those trying to fire at him.

Time seemed to slow as he hit the next batch of soldiers, and he avoided their gunfire, then increased his weight and lodged a bullet in one's skull, then slammed that person back into the others. He crumbled the steps completely beneath the feet of the next group.

This wasn't about a case. This wasn't about a mystery. This wasn't about questions. He *couldn't* stop. He couldn't *afford* to stop. If he did, life ended. He fought with grenade, bullet, and steel. He fought as the sword, put where it needed to be. For all he hated that it was necessary.

Finally—trailed by the mist, trailing death—he reached the top. The end of the stairwell. There didn't appear to be a way up to the roof from here, but he'd reached the top floor. Breathing heavily, he glanced down through the center of the stairwell—flickering electric lights illuminating broken, crumbling concrete, ripped apart as if by cannonballs. Railings twisted and covered in wreckage.

Groans, like the hollow moans of the damned, echoed up from below. Wayne's head popped out to look up at him from one floor down; he was covered in dust and chips from the broken steps.

"Did you know this was coming?" Wax whispered to Harmony. "Is this ultimately why you brought me back to Elendel? Was this why you had Lessie watch me? Did you always know?"

There was no answer, of course. Wax wasn't pierced by the right metal currently, and couldn't commune with God. Still, he felt as if he could feel Harmony trying to push through, trying to see. Fighting Trell's influence.

"Don't ask me to do this again," Wax whispered, turning away from the carnage below. "This wasn't an adventure. It was a massacre. I'll finish the job, but don't ask me again. Find yourself another sword. You don't know how this feels."

In reply, he was given a distinct impression. Almost like a memory implanted directly into his mind: an exhausted, overwhelmed man lying broken on an ashen street, in front of a shattered city gate. Surrounded by death.

Wayne arrived a moment later, scrambling up the last cracked steps. "Mate," he said softly, looking back down the stairs. "I ain't … I mean … *Wow.*"

"It isn't over yet," Wax said, easing open the door to the top floor. The two of them slipped into a large marble hallway, with fine pillars and lush red carpet. Another force was gathering at the far side, before a broad set of double doors. Wax and Wayne took cover behind a large pillar, but they'd be flanked as soon as the troops moved forward.

Fortunately, this final group seemed to be the dregs of the enemy forces. Steelsight showed him few, if any, aluminum guns. Indeed it revealed metal weapons, zippers on clothing, keys in pockets. These people wore uniforms, but not like the others—more security officer, less soldier.

Wax downed another metal vial and quickly reloaded, then … Rusts. Those cuts along his arm were throbbing. He pulled a self-clinging bandage from his pocket and wrapped it around his arm, best he could. Hopefully the damage wasn't too bad. His hand still worked fine.

"They aren't well armed," he whispered to Wayne, "but there are a *lot* of them. Building security, I'd guess. I'll go—"

"Stop," Wayne said, holding his arm.

"What?" Wax whispered.

"These ones ain't into it," he said. Then as Wax frowned, he continued, "Those other ones, the ones who came down first? They wanted us dead. They wanted to prove themselves. They wanted the fight. These poor sods? These are the last defense. And they *ain't into it.*"

"You might be right," Wax said. "But we have to keep moving. Telsin could initiate the launch at any moment."

Wayne nodded.

Then he started shouting.

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“Hey,” Wayne called loudly, his voice echoing in the marble room. “You all, out there? I know you!”

Wax gave him a glare, but Wayne ignored him. Wax knew a lotta things. But tonight the fellow had become Ruin incarnate. Wax wasn’t wrong. But he didn’t have to be right neither.

“I know you!” Wayne shouted, louder.

The hall fell quiet save for the clinking of weapons and the shuffling of feet. Wax glanced out from the side of the stone pillar, perhaps thinking he might use Wayne’s voice as a distraction. Wayne grabbed his friend’s arm, then shook his head.

“I know you,” Wayne continued loudly, looking up toward the ceiling. “Yeah. I know how you feel. You’re guards. Watchmen. Fellows what was hired to protect the building. You don’t know about this nonsense—about cities being destroyed, about dark gods. Sure, you seen creepy stuff, but you ain’t here for that. You’re here to put coin in your pocket the honest way.

“You were supposed to go home tonight. Hug your kids. Have a meal—maybe cold, but filling. You were supposed to go drinkin’ with buddies, or get a good night’s sleep for once.

“But now, here you are. Gun in hand. Wonderin’ how you got where you are. Sure, you’re only facin’ down two blokes. But you heard what happened below. Maybe just rumbles, but you heard. And you *know* there used to be a hundred or two *actual soldiers* between those two blokes and you. Now there aren’t any of them left.”

Wayne let that thought linger. The room had gone so quiet you could have heard a man cock a pistol from a hundred paces. Wayne squeezed his eyes shut, remembering. Feeling. Then he continued, softer.

"Yeah, here you are," he said. "Your hand is slick on the grip of your gun. Your heart, it feels like it's tryin' to rip outta your chest and run away. But you think, 'I ain't got no choice. I signed up for this. I gotta shoot.'

"You're *wrong.* You *don't* hafta do this, mate. To hell with what you said you'd do. To hell with it all. You're in the wrong spot, and you *know* it.

"There's a door to your right. I don't know where it goes, but at least it ain't in here. In a moment, Dawnshot and I, we're gonna come out killin'. If you stay and fight, maybe you'll get lucky. Maybe we'll kill you, and you won't hafta spend the rest of your days feeling crushed on account of what you've done this night. Shootin' lawmen, then hearin' about an entire city bein' destroyed—full of kids, and families, and men what just wanna live like you do.

"But maybe you won't get lucky. Maybe you'll actually pull that trigger and hit one of us. And if you do, it's gonna be bad. Worse than bad. It will follow you your whole damn life." He paused. "Anyway, I just wanted to say my piece. I hope there's one that listened. When we come out, if you got your gun holstered and you're makin' for that escape route in the chaos … well, we ain't gonna aim for you first."

He looked at Wax, who pulled his bandage tight, then nodded back. He'd dropped the Big Gun; it was out of ammo. But he raised his regular revolver, armed and ready.

Sometimes you needed what he'd done. You needed a sword. But Wayne figured sometimes you needed something else. A shield? Or maybe that was too poetic. He didn't know much about poetry.

Sometimes what you needed was a guy who had been there before.

The two ducked out from behind the pillar, weapons out, and saw a whole host of people pushing and scrambling to get through that exit. Wax lowered his gun, dumbfounded, and Wayne grinned as *every damn person* left. Sure, a few at the tail end glanced back—with concern, like maybe they were the guys in charge of this bunch and didn't want to leave their posts. But when the army left you alone facing two trained Twinborn with notches in their stocks running to three digits …

In seconds, the marble entry room was empty. Wax shared a look with Wayne, then they walked to the large wooden doors at the far end and threw them open, to reveal a grand staircase leading up to some kind of ballroom with a skylight. Standing at the top were a man in a suit and a woman with a bowler hat, her head completely healed, flipping a dueling cane in one hand and trying her best—but failin' somethin' awful—to imitate a Wayne grin.

"These idiots again?" Wayne said with a sigh. "All right. I'll tackle the one with the hat. You—"

"No," Wax said softly.

"No?"

"No," Wax repeated. "They were built and trained to defeat us. That man knows exactly how to hunt me."

"So…" Wayne grinned. "I take the fellow, you take the woman?"

"Damn right," Wax said, smiling. "Remember he's a Leecher. Don't get too close, or he'll wipe out your Allomantic abilities."

"Mate," Wayne said, "I'm depending on it. Let's do this."

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The Allomantic grenades in Marasi's hands vibrated so powerfully, she thought they'd shake her flesh free of her bones. The Allomancers from the Community gathered around the edges of the glowing pool, which was rapidly vanishing—their hands thrust in to touch it, draw it in. Their skin glowed as they filled with power.

Marasi had waded straight into the middle. And she could feel those troops on the other side, in a place that was somehow distant and impossibly close at the same time. Waiting.

She needed this power gone. Now. Marasi continued to draw in strength, charging her grenades. She had no idea how much they could hold. She'd never had access to this kind of strength before.

"It's too much!" a man cried. "What do I do with it!"

"Burn it!" Marasi shouted. "Use it!"

"For what?"

"It doesn't matter!" Marasi yelled. "We only need to get *rid* of it!"

Bursts of emotional Allomancy washed over her as Armal used her powers to Riot. Metal in the radio room vibrated and ripped apart. The Allomancers in the room channeled every bit of energy they could.

The pool shrank further. Marasi thought—through the blasts of confidence Armal sent—that she could sense the troops on the other side getting *agitated.* Then she felt something different. Something *emerging.* They were coming through. She understood it in a flash—you had to *want* to come through the portal. To command it to let you through. They were beginning the process.

No you don't, she thought. Then she dropped both her grenades, and used the same mental command to open the portal to them.

The movement on the other side stopped. Frozen in time as the Allomancers around her continued—wide eyed—drawing from the pool. Siphoning away the awesome power until, at last, the glow faded. The room was suddenly a normal ballroom again, with a hewn-out rock pit in the floor some three feet deep.

She was left with one final impression from the other side. Shock. Judging by how much energy she'd put into those grenades, it would be a while before the army discovered what had happened.

The other Allomancers slumped against one another, exhausted. She had never thought that using their powers would be so much work, but she felt wrung out as well. Not simply from what they'd done here— but from all of it, taking place in such a short time.

She limped to the edge of the pit and let them help her out.

"… Now what?" Armal finally asked.

"Now," Marasi said, lying back on the rock, "we hope that my friends have had an easier time of it than I have."

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Figures, Wayne thought, dashing up the steps. *Wax would want me to face the evil version of him. While he gets the easy job. My evil twin probably spent the afternoon drinkin'. She'll be a snap.* Especially since she'd gotten her face half blown off earlier in the day.

The steps led to a large ballroom, with red-carpeted floor and no furniture. A skylight kept out the mist above, but for the most part this was a wide-open room with high ceilings and no obstacles. No cover either. The two backed away a little as Wayne and Wax charged up the steps—Wax doing a steel-assisted flying leap at the end, because of course he did.

Wayne kept his eyes on the woman, pretending he was going to engage her. As soon as he drew close though, he broke to the left and tackled the Coinshot. The man cried out in shock as Wayne knocked them both to the carpeted floor.

Rusts. His cologne smells terrible.

The man scrambled to get free, but Wayne took hold of his suit coat and clung on. Wayne knew how to fight beside Wax, which translated into knowing how to fight against him. Gotta stay close to Wax, otherwise he'd do something smart, like fly up high and shoot you till you died of it.

The man grunted, trying to pry Wayne off, seeming baffled by the whole experience as they wrestled on the ground. Eventually he put his hand on Wayne's face and Leeched him—the bendalloy in Wayne's stomach vanishing.

Wayne grappled anyway, trying for a headlock, but the man was *strong*. Too strong.

"You know," Wayne said, "you're too handsome to be a copy of Wax. You oughta get a scar or something."

The man tried to seize Wayne's hand and pry it free, but Wayne let go with that hand—then grabbed the man with the other, grinning, staying close.

"You miscreant!" the man growled. "Go and fight Getruda, as is your task. I must prove myself against Ladrian!"

"Why?" Wayne said as he tried to get his arm around the man's neck—but also palmed a bit of bendalloy and popped it into his mouth. "Why do you two have this *freakish obsession* with copying us?"

"Survival," the man said with a grunt, "of those most worthy. Trell demands that her servants *prove* themselves. Against adversity. Against society. Against the roles we take. And when there are several who fit the same slot in life … well, only the strongest can survive and be rewarded."

"Rusts," Wayne said. "That is one of the most messed-up things I've ever heard, mate."

Not-Wax pried Wayne's fingers free with pewter-enhanced strength. "It is the way of Autonomy. To find our place in the coming pantheon of rulers, we *must* be the best versions of ourselves. It is not we who are copying you, but you who seek to take the places which are rightfully ours."

Wayne shifted positions, but then felt something tremble on the front of the man's coat. Wayne rolled out of the way as one of the man's buttons—metal, evidently—burst free and shot off like a bullet.

"Damn," Wayne said, rolling over. "Did you steal that button trick from Wax?"

The man stood, glaring at Wayne while pulling a gun from his holster.

"Of course you stole it from him…" Wayne said. "You really *are* tryin' to become him. I thought you weren't as freaky as the not-me over there, but you're just more classy about it, eh?"

The man started firing, but Wayne tossed up a speed bubble. Anticipating the look of shock on the man's face when he found out that Wayne still had his Allomancy, he repositioned.

* * *

The essential trick to defeating the not-Wayne, Wax knew, would be staying close enough to her that she couldn’t leverage her speed bubbles. So when Wayne broke left, Wax broke right, surprising the short, squat woman in the bowler hat.

“Oi!” she said. “That’s not fair! Fight someone your own size! Or at least your own stench!”

She tossed up a speed bubble moments before Wax drew close enough to be within its perimeter. From his perspective, she became a blur of motion. Fortunately, he’d worked with Wayne long enough to know what to do. He changed his trajectory and shot the floor with an ordinary bullet. As she came out of the blur, leaping for him, he Pushed himself out of the way to avoid getting hit by a dueling cane.

“Oi!” she said. “Stand in one place so I can clobber ya in a fair-type manner, ya rustin’ sod.”

“Is that the best you can do?” Wax said, backing away—dodging her strikes but staying close enough to be inside a speed bubble if she made one. “Really, I thought you’d be harder than this.”

“Stop quotin’ lines from your wife last night,” she snapped, “and fight me!”

She tossed up another speed bubble, catching Wax—but making it appear that Wayne and the Coinshot were frozen mid-conflict. Wayne was wrestling the fellow for some reason.

Whatever. Wax shot the woman as she drew close, but she barely flinched. She seemed to have a lot of health stored up—and that made sense if she’d begun preparing to fight him and Wayne years ago.

He jumped back, floating on a slight Steelpush to the perimeter of the speed bubble, where the air shimmered. He had to separate her from her metalminds. Wax clicked Vindication to a chamber with a hazekiller round, though she’d healed from the last one of those he’d hit her with.

Where to shoot her? He’d memorized the Hemalurgy book Death had sent them, but it would be hard to blast her spikes off her, as she would be wearing them deep in her core. Her healing power came from her metalminds though, and many surgeries embedded those in arms or legs. A pin through the arm bones was easier to recover from than one in the chest, and easier to swap out if required.

She growled and dropped the speed bubble, then attacked—clearly trying to get him to dodge too far out. But his years beside Wayne had given him a gut instinct for the precise distance to stay from her—which unfortunately meant he had to stay dangerously close to her attacks. During his next jump to get past her, he had to stay low enough that she was able to get a solid hit on his leg. It didn’t break anything thankfully, but *rusts* did it hurt.

She saw that and grinned wickedly. “Oh, that pain. That pain is *delicious.* Get in here. That was just an appetizer.”

* * *

Wayne stayed wary, putting up a speed bubble and watching the Coinshot try to take aim at him. That trick with the button worried Wayne. His remaining stored-up health would probably let him survive a hit or two, but not much more. He felt so exposed.

I have to watch out for that super-metal he has too, Wayne thought. *Or … actually … that’s probably my best way of beating him …*

After gauging the direction the man was swinging his arm as he aimed, Wayne repositioned and dropped the bubble. A series of *bangs* sounded as the man’s shots missed. Then Wayne dodged in from the other direction and tackled him again. This time the man managed to keep his feet.

Wayne grunted. “You know, Stinky—can I call you Stinky?—I can respect what you’re doin’. Gettin’ into a man’s head to figure out how to beat him? That’s good strategy. But…”

The man Leeched away Wayne’s bendalloy, then shoved Wayne off and started punching, his face turning red with anger. Wayne dodged the blows, then leaped forward and grabbed him yet again.

“But weren’t you worried?” Wayne continued. “About contamination? Wax, you see, *isn’t* a complete waste of a person. While you obviously are. So by pretendin’ to be him, you might have *accidentally* ended up doin’ something useful.”

The man growled, shoving Wayne aside, then fired a few shots. Wayne took one of those—ouch—but managed another hit of bendalloy. That was the key. People expected a man like him to run out of such an expensive metal.

But the fellow didn't know. He wasn't merely fighting Wayne the amiable miscreant. He was fighting Wayne Terrisborn, filthy rich snob with way, *way* too much money to burn.

"You know I can heal, right?" Wayne said after dodging back out of a speed bubble. "Shootin' me is kinda stupid."

"Not if it *hurts,*" the man snapped, though he stopped firing. Mistake that, lettin' Wayne talk him out of it. He couldn't know that Wayne was running low on health—but then in general, you beat a Bloodmaker by makin' them use up their metalminds.

Instead, the man fished in his pocket and brought out a pair of what seemed to be aluminum handcuffs. Wayne swallowed a wisecrack. That … was actually a good idea. If he could grapple with Wayne for long enough to lock him to something, then get away, he could shoot Wayne full of bullets at his leisure. The only way out would be for Wayne to cut his own hand off.

As he was considering, the man gestured at Wayne with the cuffs—which he didn't need to do, but Wayne could admire the nice pose—and released a *terrible* wave of Allomantic strength, one that ripped the carpet up by its staples and sent Wayne tumbling backward.

Rusts. Even his metalminds—embedded beneath the skin of his thighs—felt those blasts. Still, Wayne had been ready for it. So he *pretended* to be dazed, but instead watched keenly as the man covertly pulled an aluminum flask from his inner coat pocket and took a hit. Wax had said every time the fellow used that super-Push, he'd have to replenish his steel.

Now I know where you keep that flask, friend.

With another speed bubble, Wayne rushed in close. The man groaned as—once again—Wayne grabbed on to him.

"You annoying little *prick,*" the man snapped.

"Oh, mate," Wayne said. "You sweet mama's baby." He pulled in closer. "You ain't even *begun* to learn how annoying I can be."

* * *

“I’m supposed to like the pain,” the woman said, circling Wax as they continued their dance—him trying to stay just far enough from her to avoid being hit, but not so far as to give her a chance to back up and make a speed bubble. “That’s something I didn’t know about him. Learned it recently, ya know? In the tunnel? He likes pain. I have to like pain. Enjoy fear. Savor misery.”

Wax didn’t reply, focused on keeping the right distance.

“Do ya know why?” the woman asked, feinting in, making Wax hop backward. “I didn’t at first. Freaked me out! I hadn’t *seen* that innim. More I thought though, the more it made sense. He *must* like the pain. Otherwise he’d have ended things long ago. It’s the only answer that makes any sense.”

She lunged, and he dodged a little too far, because she broke and threw herself the other direction, rolling to the ground and becoming a blur. Wax cursed, dancing away—noticing something from the corner of his eye that made him feel comfortable backing up. A moment later, his back pressed up against Wayne’s.

“So, how’re things?” Wayne said.

“Could be better,” Wax replied.

“I hear you,” Wayne grumbled, giving them a speed bubble. “Wanna try something new? Shake it up?” He waggled one of his dueling canes in his hand.

“Sure.”

Wayne tossed a dueling cane into the air, and Wax tossed *him* Vindication, loaded with aluminum bullets. “Ignore the hazekiller chambers,” Wax said, snatching the cane from the air. “Lever on the top activates those.”

The bubble dropped, and Wax met Getruda with dueling cane against dueling cane—a crack of wood nearly as loud as Vindication, as Wayne took a few shots at Dumad.

Wax smiled at the sound. It was in some ways silly to enjoy hearing his friend fire the gun. But it wasn’t the action that mattered. It was the wound that had finally healed.

Wax parried the next set of dueling cane blows. She was better than he was—but this change-up obviously had her confused. She started at him in a more defensive posture, and he was able to briefly fend her off, then deliver a strike on her thigh. Looking for where her metalminds were embedded deep under the skin, where Allomancers couldn't interfere with them.

Not either thigh, he thought, hitting again. She, like Wayne, seemed not to mind the hits. Indeed, her eyes flashed with pain at each one, and her smile widened. At the same time, she didn't have the wild sense of pleasure he'd seen from some who truly enjoyed pain. She was trying to brute-force train herself to think like she believed Wayne did.

In some ways, that was even more disturbing.

She eventually came in more aggressively, and after he took a hit on his side—one that might have bruised a rib—he forced himself to retreat. His arm was still aching from the shrapnel earlier, and rusts … he was beginning to wear out.

So when Wayne came past him, Wax tossed him the cane back and caught Vindication as Wayne threw it. He'd fired all but the hazekiller rounds.

"More dodgin' and hittin'?" the woman asked Wax with a yawn. "I don't really mind, as it's fun watchin' you squirm. But I would rather not waste all night."

Wax needed to try something different. So with steelsight, he located a suitable piece of metal: a doorstop by a nearby door. He leaped over and grabbed it, then turned back as the woman came at him in a blur.

Time to try something old-fashioned.

* * *

Wayne landed another grapple on the Coinshot. The man had given up burning away Wayne's metals, and tried something smart. He took to the air—forcing Wayne to hold on tightly as he dangled. The Coinshot fired into the skylight, then they smashed through into the dark misty air. As they did, a shard of glass sliced the fellow along the arm something fierce.

Huh, Wayne thought. *Look at that.*

The wound didn't heal. He wasn't a Bloodmaker. So there *was* some limit on the number of spikes the Set could stick inna person. Or maybe Trell/Telsin just didn't want them to be so powerful they could challenge her.

Being in the air let Wayne control the fight far less; he really had to hold on, since if he dropped from up here—well, healing that would take basically all Wayne had. The need to hold on with both hands let the guy snap the handcuffs around one of Wayne's wrists. Rusts.

Wayne *did* get a glimpse of the apparatus set up on the rooftop though, among the construction. It included a long, sleek weapon that looked an awful lot like … well, a sausage. And sausages looked like a fellow's knob.

That had to be the rocket, and it hadn't been launched yet, which was a very good sign. Wax's sister stood there among some engineers, wearing jacket and cravat, the mists staying far away from her—like she had an invisible glass bubble. Her waiting with hands clasped behind her back, and staring off into the darkness … that seemed a bad sign.

The Coinshot let them go down lower, then used a Push off some apparatus to jerk them forward, then another Push sent them backward. The jarring motion dislodged Wayne, who dropped with a grunt of annoyance to the rooftop. Not far enough to need much healing, but still.

Damn, damn, *damn.*

Well, if the fellow was going to fight dirty, Wayne could do the same. Granted, Wayne would fight dirty *anyway,* but he felt better about it in moments like this. He ran toward the broken skylight, where hopefully he could drop down to help Wax fight Getruda.

* * *

Wax used the metal doorstop like a bludgeon, Pushing it at the woman. She dodged by instinct, as something that large would hurt more than a bullet.

Wax leaped over her as she rolled, then he Pushed the doorstop toward her again, hitting her in the arm and snapping bones.

She growled, agony breaking through her facade. It made her stumble and slow momentarily as she waited to heal—which let Wax reposition and shove the doorstop straight into her foot, shattering bones there too.

It bounced to the side, and he used a Push to soar in that direction, grab it, and shoot it again. By then she'd healed and managed to get out of the way—but this weapon made her keep dodging. Whenever she was distracted, or the bludgeon fell far enough away to be awkward retrieving immediately, he hit her with a bullet Pushed from his fingers. He didn't pause to reload. He just kept beating her down.

Her quips trailed off. He grabbed a chunk of metal from the broken skylight and used that too. He kept throwing things at her, relentless, a flurry of steel she had to dodge, or be slowed by pain and healing. Soon she seemed more *angry* than anything else, and she kept trying to find a way to engage him directly.

Wax didn't let her. He cut the woman on one side. Then the other. Then he delivered a bullet directly into her arm—and caught sight of a glimmer of metal. The wound healed over in a moment, but he knew what he'd seen. Her metalmind.

A second later, Wayne came thumping down from above, breathing heavily and muttering under his breath. Wax reached out and had his fingers in the right place to be inside the bubble when it appeared. Since any part of your body touching the perimeter would work to hold you in it, with that brush of the fingertips he was able to step in and join Wayne.

"Mate," Wayne said, "fightin' you is rustin' hard."

"Likewise," Wax said.

"It's *fun* though," Wayne noted. "He's *real* annoyed."

"Well," Wax said, "I'll admit I've often wanted an excuse to shoot someone short, with an exaggerated accent, wearing a bowler hat."

Wayne eyed him.

"It's the oddest thing," Wax said. "Can't rightly say what causes it. Instinct, I guess."

"I wear a coachman's hat," Wayne grumbled, shaking his hand—which had a handcuff on it. "It's *different.*" He took a deep breath, then pointed toward the sky, where Dumad was hiding in the mists. "I need to draw him back down. Shall we?"

Wax nodded, and as the speed bubble dropped they both made for the woman. This drew the Coinshot's attention, as he couldn't afford to let his ally be double-teamed. He landed back on the carpet, then released a barrage of Pushed bullets. As he did, Wax tossed Wayne a chunk of metal, then used a careful Push to separate the two of them. The bullets soared through the space between them.

Wax turned back to the woman, as his Push had put him closest to her. She had healed from the hits she'd received, but she appeared to be slowing, gasping for breath, covered in sweat. He knew that feeling. He ached in a dozen places, and even the adrenaline from the fight was fading before the exhaustion of an entire day spent racing a deadline.

He raised Vindication, hazekiller round chambered.

"Can you at least tell me why?" he said. "Why are you so fixated on imitating him? This goes further than trying to know your enemy."

She drew in a ragged breath. "You ever been nothin', Dawnshot?" Before he could reply, she shook her head. "No. You've always been somebody. Had two names. Even when you ran, you still had the money … the knowledge … a life spent knowin' that you were in charge of yourself. Running away was a luxury for someone like you." She paused, flipping one of her dueling canes and catching it. "Well, we don't all have that. Some of us, we take the chances we're given. And becoming someone we're not? Well, that's temptin'."

Wax kept the gun on her. "Walk away. I don't know you, but I can promise you this: They've lied to you. Trell, the Set. They've *lied*. You are somebody. And someone out there misses you."

She grinned. "They said you'd get into our heads. They said it! But see, I'm smarter than you think. I got into your heads first."

She came running at him. Wax turned Vindication a fraction of a degree and pulled the trigger—delivering the hazekiller round into her right shoulder. The secondary blast came a moment later.

Ripping her arm clean off.

She lurched to a stop, gaping at the wound. It didn't heal, as that arm had held the metalmind that stored her healing. She might have another metalmind elsewhere—having several was smart—but if so, he'd forced her to use enough healing to drain it. Because the arm didn't heal.

The wound was gruesome, but not as bad as one might imagine. Head wounds bled a ton, but if you separated a limb … well, it was awful. Yet there was always less blood than he expected.

She looked to him, almost pleading, but kept running at him. So, with a sigh, he tossed a bullet in the air and delivered it into her head with a surgical Push.

Her body dropped. Wax sighed, feeling wrung out. Now … where had Wayne run off to?

* * *

The Coinshot raised his hand toward Wayne, preparing to do his trick with the super-Push again.

Wayne braced himself, then got pushed back into a heap, barely raising a speed bubble in time. He glanced up and saw a bullet inching through the air about a finger’s width from the edge of the bubble. He rolled aside as it broke through the barrier, deflecting in the process, and went zipping past him.

Right. Okay. He gritted his teeth and launched forward, dropping the speed bubble and charging the fellow. Not-Wax was expecting this, of course. Wayne had pulled this trick multiple times. The guy flung out some bullets, which Wayne dodged.

Resigned, not-Wax raised a hand to begin grappling Wayne.

Who hit him square in the face with a dueling cane instead, smashing his nose. The man cursed and backed up, bloodied.

“Yeah,” Wayne said, “that’s better. Not so pretty anymore.”

The man howled, raising his gun.

Wayne slapped the free side of the handcuffs down on the man’s wrist. The Coinshot, bleeding from both face and arm, gaped at this. Then, after letting out a howl of rage and frustration, he *Pushed* them into the air with a powerful force. Exactly as Wayne had hoped, though the force of the launch nearly ripped his arm out of its socket.

He dangled off the fellow, then grabbed on and climbed his body, holding his coat as they shot high, high, high into the air. Up through the mists in an incredible Steelpush, going many times the height Wax could have managed with the same metal. That super-metal—duralumin, it had been called?—was really something.

“You know,” Wayne said over the howling wind, “your problem is that you specialized too much!”

The man grabbed Wayne by the throat, no longer bothering with the guns. They continued to rise, then exploded from the top of the mists into a land bathed in starlight.

“You did everything you could to learn to fight Wax,” Wayne said, “but you didn’t train to defeat me. That says you’ve been too single-minded. You should pick up a hobby or somethin’!”

They finally crested the height of the Push and began to drop. As they hit the mists again, the man shoved Wayne free, leaving him to dangle by the handcuff. With his other hand, not-Wax reached into the inside pocket of his jacket.

He came out with a yellow handkerchief, a bunny sewn in the corner.

“I suggest,” Wayne called up to him, “taking up pickpocketing. It’s rusting useful!”

And with that, Wayne tossed the man’s aluminum flask full of metals away into the darkness.

The man watched it go, his eyes widening in horror. The wind picked up again as they fell. The man scrambled, searching his body frantically.

“No others?” Wayne shouted. “Too bad!”

Not-Wax reached for Wayne as the two of them plummeted, his eyes bloodshot and enraged. But fallin’, it happened fast. Faster and faster, the more you did it. Wayne had always wondered why that was.

“Hey!” Wayne shouted. “When you meet Death—”

They crashed through the skylight, then slammed to the floor with a crunch.

All went black.

A few minutes later, Wayne blinked open his eyes and groaned. The healing he’d stored had been enough. Barely. He rolled over and looked at the Coinshot’s crumpled, broken body.

“Aw, man,” he muttered. “We dropped too fast. I didn’t get to say my awesome line.”

He found the keys to the handcuffs in the man’s pocket, and unlocked himself. Ruin, his body hurt. He’d have bruises something fierce in the morning. The metalmind had repaired the worst parts first, and saved him from dyin’. But it hadn’t been enough for anything more than an economy-class-type healing, and now he was all tapped out.

“When you see Death,” Wayne said, kicking the corpse in the side, “tell him he owes me fifty clips.”

He wandered over to Wax, who had removed the metalminds from the disembodied arm of the woman who absolutely was *not* a clone of Wayne. Takin’ those out was smart. There were stories of Compounding Bloodmakers regrowing a whole damn body from a limb that got ripped off.

“We should remove their spikes too,” Wayne said. “Just in case.”

“Let’s stop the bomb first.”

“Your sister is up there,” Wayne warned. “With the rocket thing, ready to shoot off.”

“Right, then,” Wax said. They crossed the room to the skylight.

“Why’d you keep so close to fight?” Wayne asked. “You shoulda stayed up high. Best way to fight someone *maybe* a little like me, in purely superficial ways.”

“I couldn’t. She would have run out the time. I needed to stay in close, force her to engage me.”

Huh. Well, maybe both of them had wanted things personal this time. They positioned themselves in the center of the room, ready for Wax to grab ahold and launch them both up into the open skylight—toward the mist, which cascaded down like a ghostly waterfall.

But Wax paused.

“Mate?” Wayne asked.

Still staring up, Wax fished in his pocket, then brought out a small earring. Shaped like a bent nail. A religious icon for a Pathian, but to him, so much more.

He rarely put it in, except when he had to. Tonight he hooked it into his ear, and then he whispered something.

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“I did my part,” Wax whispered. “I became your sword. I want you to do your part now.”

My part, Harmony said in his head, *is to put you where you can—*

“No,” Wax said, reloading quickly while staring up at the mists. “Not good enough. Not *damn near* good enough, Sazed. I can kill men. I’m far too good at that. But I can’t kill a god. If Autonomy intervenes, I will need you.”

Autonomy won’t intervene, he said. *It’s not our way, as it exposes us. She has Invested your sister, but mostly to let Telsin communicate with her followers and visualize plans in greater complexity than an ordinary human. She will not fight you. You won’t win this next part with bullets.*

“Can I kill Telsin?”

I’m counting on you trying to. But … I’m not certain. She might be so highly Invested that you can’t. If so, Telsin will die only if Autonomy withdraws her power.

“I’m still going to want your help.”

I—

“What can you *do*?”

I … I do not know. I can perhaps stun her. Briefly interrupt her Connection to Autonomy. Maybe.

“Be ready,” Wax said, raising his reloaded gun in one hand, then seized Wayne by the arm. Wayne nodded and held on. Wax Pushed off the nails in the carpet, sending them soaring up into the mists and onto the rooftop.

Wax felt better immediately, entering the mists. His fatigue washed away, his pains fading. The mist was something ancient, older than Harmony. It had seen the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor stop the end of the world. It had seen the Lord Ruler rise before that, and protected—perhaps threatened—the world when it had been new.

You’ve done something to me, Wax thought at Harmony, nudging them to the side and landing on the roof. *Odd things have been happening to me all day. Is it an aftereffect of holding the Bands?*

No, Harmony said. *It is something else. But it didn’t work as I*’d *hoped.*

Mists wrapped around Wax as he walked across a cold rooftop to confront Telsin. Her eyes glowed bright red, painting the nearby mist bloody. It stayed away from her. The way a dog lurked outside the range of a man who had kicked it in the past.

“You’re right,” she said. “I *have* underestimated you.”

Wax stopped a distance away, Wayne at his side. Behind Telsin was a hulking contraption with the rocket on top. Hidden from sightlines below by the “construction” at the perimeter of the rooftop, it was bathed in floodlights. Engineers worked on it furiously, sparing him nervous glances.

“Wayne,” Wax hissed, gun trained on Telsin, “go help those engineers take a lunch break.”

“Gladly,” Wayne said, hurrying over. It didn’t take much work to get them corralled into a corner.

Wax stood there, gun on Telsin, feeling … unnerved. He’d made it this far. He’d found the rocket. This should be it, shouldn’t it? But what did he do now?

Don’t get blindsided again, he thought. *Six years ago, she got the better of you. She must have something planned today too. Don’t fall for it.*

“So,” Telsin said, her eyes glowing brighter, “here we are. Now you’re going to let me destroy Elendel.”

“Like hell I will,” Wax growled.

“What would you give up, Waxillium,” she said, “to save a *planet*? How many people are you willing to sacrifice to do what needs to be done?”

She stepped closer. He cocked Vindication, thrusting it forward. Rusts.

“Autonomy likes you,” Telsin said. “She called you a masterpiece. I disagreed, but here you are, and I find myself persuaded. Harmony knows he’s growing impotent, that Discord is near, and so he created you. A sword. Who can act when he cannot.”

She stepped closer, ignoring Vindication. And why shouldn’t she? Harmony had said the gun wouldn’t do anything. Her smile as she advanced reminded him of when she’d turned on him. Of how it had felt to be betrayed by his last living kin.

That moment. That *terrible* moment when he’d realized that by saving her, he’d not only gotten himself shot, but potentially gotten Steris, Marasi, and Wayne killed as well.

That horrible moment lived on. Like crystallized agony deep within him. One last tie to his old life. He needed to defeat that as much as he did her.

“Do you think Harmony could do it?” Telsin asked, gesturing to the rocket. “If this were the only way to protect the people of this world? Could he sacrifice one city to save the rest? Or would indecision freeze him? Like a constable on their first day on the job.”

Rusts. She didn’t seem the least bit concerned by their arrival. Something was wrong. Something was *profoundly* wrong.

“Well,” Telsin said, “*I’m* strong enough. *I’ll* see it done.”

Rusts, rusts, *rusts*. This was all wrong. A quiet conversation on a rooftop? A doomsday device apparently stopped? And yet Telsin was so rusting *confident.*

You’re not merely a sword, Wax, he thought. *You’re a detective. That’s the life you chose. Be the person you decided to be. Not the one you’ve been assigned to be.*

Wax focused his thoughts, pushing away the pain of betrayal. *Think. You found those charts of launches. None of them could travel far enough. So …*

He lowered his gun. “It doesn’t work.”

Telsin froze.

“The delivery device,” he said. “All this time, and it still can’t lift a bomb this big, can it? You’d have fired it by now if it could.”

Telsin shrugged.

The detective in him grasped for connections. If she legitimately thought that the world would end if she didn't destroy Elendel, she'd have launched it anyway. On the hope that it worked. Because if she failed, everything ended anyway—so why not try?

Feeling cold, Wax raised his hand and increased his weight. Then he Pushed against the rocket. The whole construction collapsed, and the enormous weapon—the bomb—hit the rooftop with a resounding, *hollow* clang.

It was a decoy.

Telsin's eyes went wide.

He turned and looked across the city, softly blanketed in mist, made indistinct—like a dream. Here in the mists he could think; he could make the connections that had eluded him all day. Where was the bomb?

They'd been planning this for years … waiting until the delivery device was ready. Building the launchpad high to give themselves the best chance. Those were the right threads. He'd followed the correct clues.

Problem was, in the end, they hadn't been able to get it working. So when Wax had arrived earlier in the day, they'd panicked. They'd moved their bomb somewhere else. But where? Surely they weren't going to deliver it by train or by road. Too obvious. Plus, he'd told Steris to close both routes into the city. So what? They had to move and install their bomb on a new delivery device. So …

The docks, Wax realized, pieces clicking into place. *They were genuinely surprised when I located the tunnel from the mansion. Why put their lab out there near the docks, instead of secure in this tower or one of the caverns?*

Because they had another delivery method, a backup. In case the rocket never worked. And when I arrived in town they acted, taking the bomb from here to …

He spun, searching the darkness, and somehow he was able to see *through* the mist. As if it thinned just for him. Distant, beyond the city, he picked out the trailing lights of something out on the open sea. An enormous warship, a Pewternaut-class vessel that had been docked all day. A show of force, he'd thought.

But also the fastest way to carry something large toward Elendel. A method that couldn’t be stopped by a railway or road blockade.

The bomb was on that ship.

“She thought you’d find it,” Telsin whispered. “I think she prefers you to me. I’m … not sure how I feel about that.”

Wax’s mind raced. How to stop it? He rushed up to the edge of the roof, looking between the steel rods of the construction facade.

“Wax?” Wayne asked, hurrying up. “Nearly gave me a heart attack when you toppled that bomb there. What’s going on?”

“The rockets never worked,” he muttered. “Not well enough.”

“Autonomy wanted to figure them out,” Telsin said. “Turns out advanced ballistics and self-propelled rocketry proved a little beyond our grasp. Curiously, with this power I can … see hints of what is to come. But the mechanisms? Well, that takes experimentation, learning, iteration…”

Rust and *Ruin*. He couldn’t reach that ship. It was already too far out in the ocean, far beyond what a Steelpush could manage. His anchor would give out, and he’d drop into the depths.

“… Mate?” Wayne said, worried. “Wax? What’s wrong?”

Could he get to Elendel fast enough? He doubted he could outpace that ship. And even if he could, what would he do when he arrived? The ship would almost certainly detonate the bomb as soon as it drew enough of the city into the blast radius.

“Oh, give it up, Wax,” Telsin said, stepping closer. “Admit that I’m right. Did you know, that’s the most infuriating thing? When we were young I’d invite you to join me, but you’d *judge* me instead. You always thought you were too good for me.”

He turned, surprised at the vitriol in her voice.

“I’ve hated you for decades,” she hissed at him, her eyes pulsing an even deeper red. “Because you could never just admit it. Well, today, *I’m* doing what has to be done. You’re going to watch. You’re going to weep. And I’m going to Ascend.”

How?

There *had* to be a way!

“A new world begins tonight,” Telsin said. “Emerging from Elendel’s smoldering ruin. The Basin will be devoted to a new god, one who isn’t weak. Isn’t divided.

“All day you’ve hounded me. But now you’re the one who is caught, and the ship is free. The bomb is on its way. You can’t stop it. Go ahead. Throw yourself into the night, Wax! You’ll end up swimming in the bay.

“Or maybe you’ll hurry to Elendel, to join everyone who will die in the blast. The bomb is rigged to blow if the ship is stopped or struck by weapons fire. It’s too late. I’ve *won.* I—”

Hit her, Harmony, Wax thought. *Cut her off. Now.*

Telsin gasped. She stumbled, the red glow to her eyes fading, her lips parting, and fell motionless to the rooftop.

Her body is pushed past its limits, Harmony told him. *Waxillium … she’s being sustained only by the power. Get Autonomy to withdraw. Stop that ship!*

Wax met Wayne’s eyes, which were pleading with him, worried. The answer. What was the answer?

Wax looked down through the broken skylight, where mist was pouring in like water into a drain.

He could barely make out a corpse below.

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Steris stood at the central station, where people piled onto a train—a cargo train, as those could carry more people. She checked items off her list. Another district evacuated.

Broadsheets were getting wind of Steris's efforts. Entire octants being evacuated? Mysterious gas leaks used as an explanation? People were fleeing by car in larger and larger numbers, but she'd planned for that. It was part of the evacuation projections.

She nodded to TenSoon, who came prowling up, still wearing the constable's body. "Daal and the senators have fled the city. News that they are gone is spreading."

"That's troubling," Steris said. "But inconsequential before our current need."

His expression became distant. "Yes, but they took the Bands. I shouldn't have brought them out, shouldn't have let them go. I've been away from human politics for too long." He looked at her. "I didn't know, Steris. I didn't know they had been drained. I feel we were played somehow. I don't do … human very well anymore."

"We will deal with the problem of the Bands," she said, "if we have the luxury of surviving what is coming."

He growled softly, but it seemed more like a sigh than a sign of disagreement. They both turned as Governor Varlance walked up, wiping his brow with his handkerchief. He'd begun the meetings today wearing white face makeup, but little of that remained, just some patches on his cheeks.

His presence lent a great deal of authority to Steris's orders. People were comforted to see him, the governor, directing efforts. Simply by standing near her, he had probably saved thousands of lives.

It had proved difficult to keep him from talking and spoiling the effect by being … well, himself. "How are you doing?" she asked him, making a notation as another train chugged away. "Perhaps some more coffee?"

"No," he said. "Thank you." He paused and spoke more softly. "How many do you think we can save?"

"It depends entirely on how much time we have."

"Assume there's not much," he said, his voice growing even more hushed. "Lady Ladrian, we just received a report from intelligence operatives in Bilming. Something has happened."

She felt a coldness deep inside. "Artillery launch?"

"No," he said. "Bilming has launched one of its *warships* toward Elendel. Full speed."

A warship. She turned and waved toward Reddi, who was instructing his constables to keep lines organized as people were loaded onto the next trains.

He jogged over. "Bilming has launched a warship," Steris said.

"A single warship?" Reddi said. "We can handle that, even without a navy of our own."

"Indeed," the governor said.

Only one ship? Going at full speed?

Oh no.

The answer was obvious to her.

"The ship *is* the bomb," she said, her eyes wide. "Wax said he was going to try to interrupt the artillery launch. So they sent a ship instead, at full speed, laden with explosives."

"Blessed Preservation," Reddi whispered, then looked at the vast station still full of people. They, including the ones already evacuated, represented only a fraction of the city's population. "Can we shell it?"

“And detonate the bomb?” Steris asked. “They wouldn’t have chosen this delivery mechanism if destroying the ship would stop the bomb.”

“So Dawnshot has failed,” the governor said, slumping to the side against a pillar. “Elendel is lost.”

“How long do we have?” Steris asked.

“At full speed from Bilming?” Reddi said. “Not long. Hours at most. Most likely less than that.”

“We can get away,” the governor said, “if we leave *now.* We have to get on this train!”

Steris stood there, numb. The other senators had already evacuated. They would rant all day that she was wrong, but when there was a whiff of actual smoke, they broke down the doors to flee.

But she knew. She *knew.*

She slammed her hand against her notebook, surprised at her forcefulness, causing the panicking governor to hesitate.

“That ship,” she said, “will not reach this city.”

“How do you know?” the governor said.

“Because my husband, Waxillium Ladrian, will prevent it.”

“And if he doesn’t?” the governor said.

Steris flipped through her notebook to the disaster scenarios she’d anticipated, landing on a specific page full of projections about the dangers of offshore earthquakes.

“He will,” Steris promised. “But we need to evacuate the region nearest the bay just in case. And prepare for the possibility of a tsunami.” She flipped to a map of the city, pointing. “We need these areas evacuated next in case the best my husband can do is detonate the weapon early.”

“But … if Dawnshot fails…”

“He will not fail,” Steris said. She took the governor by the arm. “I need your help. Don’t go. Stay. Be a hero, Varlance.”

“But…”

“My husband will stop the ship.”

“How do you *know*?” he asked. Nearby, one of the trains let out a jet of steam, and last call was shouted. Governor Varlance took one step that way, but then looked to her.

“Some things,” she said softly, “cannot be planned for in life. I struggled to learn that, Varlance. But there is one thing I’ve learned that is true: No matter what else happens, Waxillium Ladrian *will* get wherever he needs to be. Somehow.”

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Marasi undid the final latch and heaved open the heavy metal hatch. Her arm and leg still ached, but she'd overcome her immediate exhaustion.

No army had appeared. The soldiers in Wayfarer, with Entrone captured, had backed down. Most everyone else—by the lord mayor's orders—was confined to quarters.

Everyone was waiting to see what happened next.

"We should have known," Armal whispered from lower on the ladder. "This much metal, by their own admission, would have drawn their 'mutants.' This hatch was never to lock them out, but to lock us in, so we could never visit the observation room unsupervised."

Marasi climbed up into the observation chamber, which was indeed different from the projection room she'd visited earlier in the day. This one was a simple round room with one flat wall—the "window" that displayed a destroyed city and falling ash. Apparently opening the hatch triggered the system.

Knowing what she did, Marasi could see the flicker of the image as proof of its fake nature—but to someone who had never encountered anything like it, it would be astonishingly convincing. Somehow appearing on the back wall without the projector streaming light through the room in a way that could be interrupted.

Marasi helped Armal and the others up through the hatch. The four were immediately transfixed by the image. In the next room they found the projector—set up to shine onto the back of a sheet and create the image in the main room.

As the four former captives inspected the equipment and put their hands between it and the sheet, Marasi found and opened another small door—one to the outside. It let the mists pour in, revealing that they were in a small, nondescript building in a warehouse district. The door looked out onto a street—and a good portion of the city was visible beyond, twinkling with electric lights.

Armal and the others gathered around her, staring. Marasi could only imagine their emotions. They'd believed her enough to fight Entrone and the Set, but seeing this … knowing what had been stolen from them …

"I'm sorry," Marasi said. "I—"

"Have you appreciated it?" Armal whispered.

Marasi frowned as the woman regarded the city.

"These seven years," Armal said. "Have you *used* them? Have you *appreciated* them? I spent them wishing I could have even one more day of my old life. That I could show my children a world of lights and life, instead of stone and shadow. Please. Tell me you *lived* those years of freedom."

"I…" Marasi said.

Had she? She had spent much of that time with Allik, and that had been wonderful. And she'd accomplished much in her career. But was it what she wanted, ultimately?

Or, was it *all* she wanted?

She'd seen and learned so much. And yet … these poor people, kept in the shadows. How much sooner could they have been saved if Moonlight and her people had been more *forthright* with what they knew? Marasi and the Ghostbloods had been working toward the same goal for years, and she had never known it.

People suffered when the truth became a commodity to be speculated upon.

For now she looked up—peering through the mists, toward some spotlights shining high above. Was that … the top of the Shaw in the distance? Lit up so it blazed in the mists like some kind of mythical beacon?

As she watched, something flashed there, and the lights—in an explosion—went out.

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It had taken Wellid far too long to decide he hated the ocean.

He had volunteered for this duty—sailing the Pewternaut A16 from Bilming to Elendel—because he'd figured it would be the safest. On a giant ship made of steel? The biggest the world had ever seen? Protected by the thick hull from enemy bullets?

He figured that at least—once the war started—he'd be aboard the most indestructible ship ever built. Yes, they were going to engage Elendel, but he'd prefer that to being in Bilming where that crazy lawman swooped around.

But now here he was, the familiar glow of Bilming retreating in the distance. Ordered to keep watch on the deck as they steamed across the choppy waters. Keep watch for what? There was nothing out here but churning froth and mist. They were even cutting lights on the ship, now that they were out of the bay and beyond any other vessels they might hit.

He'd thought that sailing out on the ocean would be serene, but not tonight. The crash of waves, the thrum of engines. And other … phantom noises from out there somewhere. Splashes that didn't match the flow of the water. Distant screeches that might have been gulls. Only what gull screeched at night?

Spooked by the sounds, he slid open the hood on his lantern. Unfortunately, that just lit up the mists—making a blazing halo around Wellid. He couldn't make out much of the waters; the ship's deck was pretty high up in the air. When he'd signed on, he hadn't realized how intimidating it would be to look down. It was like he was atop a three-story building, the water all the way below.

“What are you doing?” a harsh voice said from behind. Gabria? The more senior sailor took him by the arm and quickly closed the lantern’s hood. “Didn’t you hear the order? Once we’re out of the bay, we’re running dark. Do you want Elendel to be able to target us?”

“I thought I heard something,” Wellid said, prying his arm free. “I’m on watch. Aren’t I supposed to watch for things?”

“If you hear something suspicious,” she said, “report it. Don’t open your lantern unless *absolutely* necessary. Didn’t you listen to the briefing?”

“Sure I did,” he said. Though his mind *did* tend to wander.

“Why are you wearing a life jacket?” she asked. “That wasn’t ordered.”

“I want to be safe,” he said. “Hey, Gab? What are you going to do with your reward?”

With the lantern shielded, he couldn’t see her in the darkness. But she seemed to stare at him for an uncomfortably long time. Was he missing something?

“Reward?” she said.

“Sure,” he replied. “The great reward we were promised. For this mission?”

“Wellid, what do you think we’re doing?”

“Delivering a payload,” he said. “To Elendel. It’s a weapon, right? We drop it off, then we get out of there?”

Another uncomfortable pause. “Yes,” she said. “Get out of there. That’s right. But I’m not doing it for the reward.”

He should have expected that. The others, well, they were all a little bit more … diligent about all of this. Trell. The impending war with Elendel. They’d have probably volunteered for this mission even if it hadn’t been aboard a giant indestructible warship.

“Keep that lantern shielded,” Gabria said, “and fetch me if you hear or see something suspicious. *Credibly* suspicious.”

She stalked off across the deck, leaving him alone with the cold mists and indifferent waters. He was supposed to patrol, but they hadn’t given him a specific route. So after listening to those waves, and feeling like he could hear the darkness watching him, he walked in the direction Gabria had gone. Logically he'd need to stick close to—

What was that?

That thump against the hull *surely* hadn't just been his imagination. He was near the back of the ship—um, the aft of the ship, sir—and the sound had come from farther along. He inched forward, wielding his lantern in a shaking hand. Even shielded, it let out a *tiny bit* of light. Letting him better make out the ship's back railing.

That noise was nothing, he told himself forcibly. You heard things in the mists. Everyone knew that. He shouldn't say anything, because Gabria had—

A hand reached up from the darkness below and seized the top bar of the railing. A shape followed, pitch black, vaguely human, heaving itself onto the deck. It had *tentacles* waving behind it, a hundred of them curling like the mists. In that shadow, Wellid saw a misbegotten shape. A thing that wasn't human, a thing that *couldn't* be human. The mists seemed to know this, for while they played with the waving tentacles, they stayed away from the figure. It *repelled* the mist.

It was a mistwraith, Wellid knew. A terror from the deep, a relic of ancient times. A thing of stories and legend come to claim his soul.

He found his voice and screamed. With fumbling fingers, he threw open the shield on the lantern, bathing the deck in light. Revealing …

A man. Tall, with prominent sideburns, his vest and cravat peeking from underneath a thick duster—mistcoat tassels spraying out behind him in the wind.

Dawnshot was here. On the *ship.*

Gabria spun from farther down the walkway. "Wellid, why—" She cut off immediately, seeing Dawnshot there. She gaped long enough for a second man to climb up over the railing, land with a thump, then pull on a damp bowler hat.

"No!" Gabria finally said. "*How?*"

Dawnshot flung wide his mistcoat, revealing what had been obscured before: a large metal spike protruding from his lower chest, where it had been pounded right through his clothing to pierce him directly between two ribs.

* * *

Slowly, awareness returned to Telsin.

She found herself on the rooftop, near her failed decoy. Even before Wax's arrival, she'd been worried. Autonomy's deadline was today. Maybe she could have gotten more time—made the rocket work—except … except for *him.*

She growled softly and rolled over to find one of the engineers shaking her arm. What had happened? Her Investment from Autonomy should have prevented a blackout like that. She felt … wrung out. Her core cold, her arms sore from scraping the rooftop, her skin clammy. Rusts. She felt practically *mortal* again.

What is happening? she asked Autonomy.

You, the distant—too distant—voice said, *are failing me.*

No. The bomb is being delivered! I'm … I'm …

For the first time, she took in the wreckage around her. A broken rooftop. Bent steel girders. A smashed remnant of her missile-launching construction.

"What … what happened?" she hissed.

"They took spikes from the bodies," the woman said, pointing. "Ordinary ones, not made of your metal. But one granted … duralumin."

No.

Telsin heaved herself to her feet and stumbled to the edge of the building to stare out over the bay. The force of Wax's Push had bent and crushed the very underlying girders of the skyscraper here, leaving the rooftop cracked and sloped.

Your failure begins, Autonomy said, voice increasingly distant. *You are not worthy.*

The fire inside Telsin died. The power that had for so many months warmed her was leeching away. Her skin began to turn grey.

No! she thought. *No! The bomb cannot be stopped. If they interfere, they will destroy themselves and the city.* Potentially both cities. Rusts.

We … shall see …

Telsin gasped and fell to her knees, trying to reassure herself. It was just Wax. He'd been an annoyance since childhood, but he'd never *actually* interrupted anything she'd set in motion. Honestly, he probably hadn't even reached the ship. A jump like that was nearly impossible, and his aim wasn't *that* good.

Was it?

* * *

Wax downed a vial of metals from his belt, replenishing his steel. That jump had been incredible, with Wayne on his back, a flash of rushing wind and power reminiscent of holding the Bands of Mourning. He had barely made it to the ship after slowing their final approach with Allomancy—eventually landing them near some portholes a few feet below the open deck. He expected to get an earful for making Wayne climb the rest of the way.

A sailor reached for her gun, and Wax for his own. But before either of them could draw, Wayne flung a handful of bullets into the air and Pushed them to streak through the air, dropping the woman.

"Ruuusts," Wayne said. "Is that what it's always been like for you? That was so easy!" Wayne eyed him. "Gotta be honest, almost ruins your reputation, mate. If people knew how easy bein' a Coinshot was, they'd all stop talkin' about how great you are."

Wax shook his head, pointing Vindication at the second sailor—the trembling one holding up the lantern. Wayne had of course insisted on a spike for himself. Ruin. Wax hoped what they'd done hadn't been *too* blasphemous.

No, Harmony's voice said in his head, *not blasphemous, Waxillium. More … a sense of industrious recycling.*

"Good to know," Wax muttered.

I cannot see where the bomb is, Harmony told him. *I can see only what you do. I didn't know the ship was the delivery mechanism—but I am afraid the device will have redundancies and dead man's switches. Take care. We* *cannot afford to detonate it by accident. I fear that even at this range, it would be deadly to many innocent people.*

Strange. He'd come all the way around to finding God's voice in his head comforting again.

Wayne seized the fellow with the lantern by the arm, holding tight and staring him in the eyes—though the man didn't seem to need any further intimidation.

"The bomb," Wax said. "Where is it?"

"The … the payload?" the man stuttered, then pointed to a nearby door. "In the munitions hold. A-all the way down. Follow the red lines painted on … on the walls."

Wax shared a glance with Wayne, then nodded.

"You can't go inside!" the man said. "The weapon is fragile and might explode, so only the experts are allowed to touch it! You'll blow up the entire ship!"

"Then mate," Wayne said with a drawl, "I suggest you find a way to not be on the ship anymore. Real fast."

Wayne let go. The nervous fellow glanced from Wax to Wayne, then—with a sense of panic—threw himself off the ship into the churning waters below, taking his lantern with him and leaving the two of them in darkness.

"Damn," Wayne said. "I meant for him to find a lifeboat or somethin'."

"The people on this ship are going to be zealots," Wax said. "Considering they're on a suicide mission." Shouts from farther along the deck, including other lanterns being unshuttered, indicated that someone had noticed what was happening.

With increasing urgency, Wax led the way to the metal door the man had indicated. A Push slammed it open, revealing a stairwell to the decks below. He surprised several sailors coming up, armed with rifles. They didn't get a chance to fire before Wax dropped them. He then soared to the landing. This entire ship was metal—steps included. It made for some easy—

Wayne crashed down beside him, thanks to a maladroit Steelpush. He scrambled back to his feet.

"That part's harder than it looks," Wayne admitted. "You sure you got my spike in the right spot, mate?"

"I studied the Lord Mistborn's book thoroughly over the years, Wayne," he said. "If I'd placed the spike wrong, you'd be in an extreme amount of pain."

Wayne grunted, then grabbed one of the rifles from the fallen sailors. He nodded to Wax, and—despite calling for the sailors to surrender—they had to shoot a few on their way down. Following the red lines, they reached a small hold labeled MUNITIONS DUMP.

Someone really ought to explain, Wax thought, unlocking the door and slipping the key into his pocket, *that leaving a guard outside with the key is a terrible practice.* He stepped over the body of the guard and joined Wayne inside the room.

It was square, perhaps thirty feet across, and had three very large barrel contraptions—covered in wires, maybe five feet tall—near the center, spaced about five feet from one another. There was another device on the far wall, also rigged with wires—these leading to the three barrels. There were no obvious timers, control panels, or anything of the sort. It was, frankly, baffling.

"Careful, mate," Wayne said as he inspected the contraption. "Be *real* careful."

"It's some kind of dead man's rig," Wax said. "These three barrels are the explosive devices, each with its own power source. Disarm one, and it will send a signal to detonate the other two via that contraption on the wall. Wayne, tell me you still have those schematics."

"Course I do," Wayne said, digging in his pocket. "Got lots of interesting stuff in here." He pulled out the schematics Wax had given him, then spread them out on the floor.

You are right, Harmony said in Wax's head, processing the information far faster than he could. *Actually, it's worse than you think. The control device is sending a pulse every twenty seconds to the three barrels, telling them not to detonate. If that stops, they'll go off.*

That is combined with a dead man's rig. If something happens to one of the bombs, the other two will detonate. Even if we had three people, one disarming each barrel at the same time, it wouldn't work. The timing is too precise for humans. You'd *end up detonating two of the bombs.*

“How much destructive power are we talking about?” Wax asked, folding out the bomb schematics. “What if we set a charge, get out of here, and let it blow in the middle of the ocean?”

Waxillium, Wayne … Harmony said, and Wayne perked up, apparently hearing the conversation too. *This is a new kind of explosive—the direct transformation of matter into energy. I don’t think Autonomy or her agents understand how destructive this is. Looking at this, and how much metal they’ve used, I suspect they severely underestimated this bomb’s power.*

If we were simply talking about harmonium blowing up when combined with water, then yes: you could detonate it safely out here in the ocean. But a blast caused by splitting harmonium with trellium … My friends, I have no idea *how much power that would release. I can’t exactly be sure what will happen if something this powerful is ignited. It could set the very atmosphere ablaze.*

If not, it would potentially vaporize not just Elendel and Bilming, but many cities nearby as well. Your sister is desperate, and Autonomy is callous. I doubt they tested anything on this size or scale in those caverns. We can’t *let this explode. But … I also can’t see a way to disarm it.*

Wayne whistled softly. Wax carefully backed away, not touching any of the wires. The only safe thing to do would be to get this ship—and everything it contained—as far from civilization as possible.

“So,” Wayne said, “guess we get to steal a ship, eh? That’s new.”

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Steris didn’t have nearly enough time.

But she had learned, from both accounting and contracts, never to be overwhelmed by scale. Dealing with sums of money in the millions didn’t make a thousand boxings less valuable. In a similar way, being unable to completely evacuate the city—or even a region of it—didn’t lessen the value of a single life.

So she left Constable-General Reddi to handle the main evacuation and hurried with the governor to the city docks. Her master plan included these people leaving via boat, which meant tons of people now crowded the docks. If that bomb exploded nearby, all of these would be in serious danger. In addition, she worried about flooding. She knew only a little regarding this possibility from the studies she’d read—but that was enough to make her alarmed.

She had to rectify this miscalculation. Get as many people away from this region as she could. The governor took command of the dockworkers via their foremen. Following her instructions, he sent them to begin wrangling people for a retreat farther into the city.

Steris set her notebooks out by a lantern on a workman’s desk, sitting beneath the dark night sky, on the road above the bay, worried about her low resources in this region.

“Steris Ladrian?” a voice said from behind her.

She turned to find a group of eight men and women in nondescript clothing. “We were told,” said the man at their lead, “you could use our help.”

“Did the governor recruit you?” she asked.

“Actually—”

He was interrupted as Governor Varlance came jogging up, followed by several workers.

“You,” Steris said, ripping out a page and thrusting it toward one of the men. “Train conductor? I need all of these people gathering here inside those cargo trains. You,” she said, pointing to another. “Crane operator, right? I need those cargo bins moved into positions blocking the streets here, arranged to stem and slow a flood of water, in case of a tsunami.

“Construction workers, congratulations. You’re now constables. Wear your brightest hats and vests and get the people from these three sections moving inland away from the docks. I’ve outlined a route for you. You won’t get far, but putting buildings between you and the ocean is essential.

“Dockworkers, I need ropes. As many as you can find. We’re going to make stable anchor points where we can start human chains to grab anyone who might be swept away if there’s a flood. Hurry! Our primary concern is a blast out in the bay. Our secondary concern is flooding.”

The majority of the foremen ran off through the mists, calling for their crews. It was rather fulfilling how alacritously they obeyed. She wasn’t accustomed to people simply doing what she said; in the past they’d always needed a great deal of persuasion.

“I’ve noted the structures I believe are strong enough to withstand a blast or flood,” Steris said to the governor. “We should evacuate people in this region to the middle floors, congregated away from windows.”

“This…” the governor said, looking over the plans. “This is incredible! Why haven’t you shared any of this?”

“It’s mostly done for my own amusement,” Steris admitted. “Or my own anxiety.”

“What a waste,” he said, picking up one of the sheets. “I thought your evacuation plan was exhaustive, but this is even more so. It’s *brilliant.* You have detailed plans like this for other disasters?”

“Only fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, sudden invasions, dust storms, droughts, food shortages, and mass pipe breakings. There are seven more I want to get to.”

He stared at her, his eyes wide, several of the remaining officials gathering around and nodding as they looked over her maps, instructions, and plans. “Your talents,” the governor whispered, “have previously been *wasted,* Lady Ladrian.”

What … What was this emotion?

Feeling *appreciated*? She’d felt appreciated before by Wax, yes, and occasionally Marasi. But to see it in the eyes of virtual strangers, to have her overplanning seen as a *talent,* not a bizarre character flaw …

By the Survivor. This warmth inside. She’d always said she didn’t care what people thought of her. And she’d worked hard to build that bubble around herself, a protection against the way she was normally treated.

But this … this was a remarkable feeling. Was this what it felt like to be *proud* of who you were? Instead of worried you were embarrassing those around you?

Miraculous.

“What is next?” the governor asked. “What else can we do?”

“I want to sink those ships,” Steris said, pointing to the large cargo vessels out in the bay that were waiting to be called in to receive passengers. “After bringing their sailors in safely first, of course.”

“Excuse me,” one of the remaining foremen said. “*Sink* them?”

“I think it might slow the water,” Steris said, “in case of a tsunami. You read what happened to the island of Alicago three years ago? No? Well, anyway, think of speed bumps. Large cargo ships on the surface will glide over the water, or worse be carried with it and slammed into people on the docks. Scuttled on the bay’s floor though, they’ll create drag and slow the force of the wave if one comes.”

Again, instead of objecting or complaining, the foremen simply accepted her explanation—and her orders. Only one seemed concerned. He hesitated as the others began to move off.

“What is it?” Steris asked.

“His Honor the governor,” the man said, “told us there wasn’t much time left. To get those ships sunk might take hours, ladyship. We’ll have to take tugs out to them—not many of the cargo ships have radio yet—and then explain to the captains, probably fight them on it. Then the scuttling process … it's not as easy as it sounds. I'd guess four, five hours to get this lot sunk. At least."

Rusts. Well, that wouldn't work.

Someone cleared their throat behind her. One of the eight people who had approached her first. Oh, right—she still didn't know who had sent them, or even who they were.

"Perhaps we can help," the man in the lead said. "You are certain this is legal? The mass sinking of private ships?"

"Yes," the governor said. "On my authority. If we are so fortunate as to have overreacted, the city will pay for the losses incurred by the ship captains."

"Ohhh…" Steris said, leaning toward him. "Varlance, that sounded positively *heroic*."

"Really?" he asked, eager. "Heroic?"

"Decisive," she said. "Very leaderlike."

Nearby, the leader of the eight people nodded to her, then launched into the air.

Oh! Allomancers. She had all the official ones working on the main evacuation. But having these to sink ships would certainly help. And then she could use them to help carry the injured or infirm away with Steelpushes.

The others followed one at a time, until only one remained. He nodded to Steris, and on the back of his hand—mostly obscured—she saw a red tattoo.

"Your sister," the man said, "sends her regards." Then he launched after the others.

That was the last of the meaningful actions Steris could take. From here, she could only make certain her plans were being executed. Everything else rested on Waxillium. None of this would matter if that bomb reached the city.

You'd *better be on that ship, Wax,* she thought.

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Clearing the ship proved to be an ordeal. Even worse than that time Wax had decided to teach Wayne “the value of hard work” by making him muck out a stable all on his own. Yeah, he’d learned the value of hard work—it turned out to be three clips. Least, that was what Jeffy had charged to do the job for Wayne.

This time, there was nobody else to do the job. After locking the door to the room with the bomb, they set out to take control of the ship. Wayne kept the key in his pocket, in case Wax had to face another Coinshot.

They didn’t meet any. The ship had only a skeleton crew; seemed they’d saved most of their troops to protect the Shaw. It took some time to fight their way to the bridge regardless, given the need to check every corner and flush out people trying to ambush them. Wayne thought every crew member on board had been mustered to try to stop them.

When, half an hour or more later, Wax finally Pushed down the reinforced door to the bridge, they found a disturbing sight. Four people—three women and a fellow—dead on the floor from self-inflicted gunshots. All wore officers’ uniforms. They’d killed themselves rather than fall into custody.

“You know,” Wayne said, shouldering his rifle, “I thought the weird ones would all be in the Roughs, you know? City folk, they were supposed to be educated. And … and refined. And not bleedin’ *zealots.*”

Wax checked the bodies to be sure, then stepped up to the ship’s front controls. They were a confusing mess of levers, along with a giant ship’s wheel that appeared to have been locked in place. The ship was still moving at full speed through the mists, and *rusts.* Wayne thought he could see the glow of Elendel on the horizon. They were getting close.

Wax stopped at the controls, then cursed softly.

"What?" Wayne said.

"It's wired to the same system," Wax said. "Harmony? Can you confirm?"

Yes, unfortunately, the god said. *With you to give me sight, I can see that it's wired into the bomb.*

"If we undo the locks on the controls, it blows," Wax said. "I should have foreseen this. We wasted time coming up here."

"But—" Wayne said.

"It makes a brutal sense," Wax said. "They guided the ship here, then locked the course down before killing themselves. The thing will explode the moment it stops—as soon as it hits land. We're not on a traditional ship. This is a *rocket,* like the one they built to fly to Elendel. Self-propelled. Needing no controls. Set to detonate the second it hits."

"Mate," Wayne said, pointing out the front windows. "I see lights."

You have approximately twenty minutes, Harmony said softly, *at current speed.*

"We have to risk trying to defuse the bomb," Wax said, rushing out onto the deck.

Wayne scrambled to follow, tripping on bodies. "Wait! You said that if we tried, we'd almost *certainly* blow the thing!"

"Do you have a better idea?"

"Maybe," Wayne said, halting beside the railing—mists coursing past like a river in the sky.

Wax froze, turning back to him.

Did Wayne have a better idea?

Actually … actually he *did.* He looked out at the ocean and realized something. This ship here … well, this was a lot like a lone mesa. It fit way better than the Shaw had. Yes, a solitary mesa in the middle of flat lands …

And it needed to gobble up the hero.

“You said that this bomb,” Wayne said, “it blows up big if detonated proper. But one part of it is ettmetal, right?”

“Harmonium,” Wax said. “Yes. And?”

“And that stuff is so unstable, it blows up if *water* touches it. Except in a *smaller* explosion? One that won’t level cities and such?”

“It’s still bad,” Wax said. “But not catastrophic. But if we fiddle with one of the devices by pouring water into it to detonate the ettmetal, the others will simply go off.”

“Unless,” Wayne said, “we were using a speed bubble. See, there’s that device on the wall, right? And if we fiddle with one of the bombs, it’s going to detonate the other ones?”

“Right,” Wax said.

“So, what if we put up a speed bubble that leaves *out* the device on the wall? We could work on one of the barrels, detonating the harmonium in it so the *real* explosion can’t happen. We set that explosion off, then kick *that* barrel out of the speed bubble. It’ll send a warning to the other two barrels, but that signal will have to pass along the wires outside the speed bubble, to reach the box on the wall. So the signal will be frozen in time and can’t come back! We could work on the other barrels during that time.”

“Wayne,” he said, “do you have any idea how quickly electricity moves? Even assuming you could do something incredible—like speed up time by a factor of a thousand—that wouldn’t be nearly fast enough to outrun an electrical signal.”

Oh.

Wait, Harmony said to them. *This could work. I have a way. Wax, I gave you a vial with a red cork.*

“I have it,” Wax said, fishing in his sheath of metal vials. He frowned, and came out with … a handkerchief.

“Barely used,” Wayne said.

“Wayne…”

Wayne grinned and handed Wax his rifle, then fished in his pocket. “I thought it needed to be somewhere safe. So I made a nice little trade.”

“Harmony,” Wax said, “if you can make this work, it will still detonate the ship, right?”

Yes.

"Wayne," Wax said, "… setting off the smaller explosions would kill everyone in that room. An ettmetal blast like that isn't something you survive, even if you had full metalminds."

"Ah," Wayne said as the ship hit a wave, water spraying up along the side. "I'd figured out that part. I just needed to know if the idea worked. And I needed to confirm one other thing."

"Which is?" Wax said.

"That the plan doesn't need you, mate," Wayne said, and he Pushed. Shoving Wax—via the barrel of the rifle he was holding—outward off the ship and through the mists. Wayne felt real proud of that Push. He did it like Wax did, crouching down first to give it a little lift.

His friend gave him a look of outrage … and maybe regret … as he vanished into the misty darkness over the waters.

"Land safely, mate," Wayne whispered. "And survive."

He tipped his hat, then pulled out the red-corked vial. "What the hell is this, anyway?"

Earlier in the week, you all conducted a test, Harmony said. *Splitting harmonium.*

"Same test our enemies have done a hunnerd or more times."

Yes, but this one was different. I have no idea what happened, but Wax did something different *from everyone else trying this. Because he didn't merely blow up the room. He created something. Something amazing.*

Wayne held up the vial, staring at the metal dust settled at the bottom.

That, Harmony said, *is the faintest bit of lerasium, Wayne. A metal from legend. A metal found by Vin at the Well of Ascension, and used to make Elend Venture a Mistborn. A metal that hasn't existed for centuries, and as far as I know, hasn't been* made *in millennia. Drink that vial and you'll be a Mistborn, able to use all of the metals. There's a little of each one in there.*

"Why didn't you have Wax drink it earlier?"

I don't want to reveal this happened, as I don't know why or how. I don't know what he did. Besides … he might have already had a dose, inhaled during the explosion.

Huh. That explained a few things.

Wayne knocked back the vial. Then he waited. Nothing happened.

"That's anticlimactic," he muttered.

You have to burn the lerasium, Wayne.

Oh, right. He searched, and found a new metal reserve. Neat. He reached out and burned it.

A flash of light.

A fire in his veins.

A feeling like a kick to the face.

Damn.

"How does this help?" he asked.

You can now burn duralumin.

"That fancy metal that not-Wax was using to make those big Steelpushing explosions?"

Exactly.

"I don't need to Push though."

Wayne, using duralumin burns all the metals in you at once. Every single bit. The more you have, the more powerful it is. It doesn't just work on steel. It works on any Allomantic metal.

Wayne paused, the ship rocking, then whistled softly, understanding. "You mean…"

How much bendalloy do you have left?

He fished a pouch out of his pocket.

Hmm. Maybe enough to—

Wayne fished another pouch out of his other pocket.

Okay, and—

And the pouch in his sock. Uncomfortable, but handy.

Wayne, how many pouches do you have?

"Seventeen," he said. "I'm a fancy rich guy now. Will that be enough?"

Oh, Wayne. Yes. I think it will.

Wayne turned and took the steps down at extra-fast speed—grabbing a canteen off one of the corpses. He swallowed mouthfuls of metal beads on his way, stuffing himself with bendalloy. Echoing noises warned him about sailors trying to break into the room to detonate the bomb, but they didn't have a key. He dealt with both men, then burst back into the room. Electric lights flickered on the walls, and he could hear the chugging of the engines somewhere farther inside the ship.

… And suddenly he wasn't alone. A figure—mostly transparent—stood beside him, a tall bald man. Terris. And another *darker* fellow stood behind him. Not in the skin tone sense or anything. Like … this other one was a shadow. It mimicked Harmony as he held out his hands to Wayne.

"I knew," Harmony said softly, "that I had to bring Wax to Elendel. It is possible to see future needs. I understood it would be *good* to make this choice, though one doesn't always know why. Even if one is a god." He hesitated. "I thought I only needed Wax. It seems that I was wrong."

Wayne tossed up a speed bubble, so that time didn't move so quickly. He needed a moment to compose himself.

"It *should* be Wax," Wayne said. "He's the one that fixes messes like this."

"No," Harmony said. "You have practiced all your life with speed bubbles, Wayne. Wax would be brand new at them. You might be the only person in the world who could do this."

"That's kind of depressing," Wayne said, turning to Harmony. "Really, *I'm* the best you could do? Ain't you God?"

Harmony's eyes softened. "Wayne. You aren't the best I could do. *You're the best there is.* And no being, neither god nor mortal, could have wished for more than one such as you."

Wayne wanted to reject that. But damn, if God was sayin' it … maybe … maybe Wax was right? About Wayne?

Damn. Had Wax been right *all along*?

"You don't have to do this," Harmony whispered. "I will never again force such a choice upon someone. Unfortunately, it is the only sure solution that I can think of, and my thoughts move with exceptional speed. This preserves, but it … destroys."

"The only solution that is sure," Wayne said. "There's another?"

"It is possible—very slightly possible—that you could use your new powers to Push hard enough against upcoming sources of metal to hold the ship back, treading water, while we gain more time and figure something else out. It would be exceptionally difficult, but it's plausible."

“You can see the future,” Wayne said. “Would it work?”

“I can see *probabilities*,” Harmony said. “I can see what *might* happen. It is, at times, frustrating.”

“And … what are the chances that other option works?”

“One in a hundred, maybe.”

One in a hundred? A one percent chance at survival.

… And a ninety-nine percent chance it failed. Meaning a whole ton of people got vaporized.

Damn. What a day to leave his lucky hat behind.

“There’s this family what doesn’t have a daddy because of me,” Wayne said, stepping forward. “You’ll take care of them?”

“Of course.”

“Will Wax survive this?”

“Normally, no person could,” Harmony said. “Considering explosions in water are exceptionally dangerous. Fortunately, this one will be channeled mostly upward—and Wax has pewter now. So long as he burns the metals in those other vials I gave him, he should survive the blast. I will … do what I can to help Preserve him. But Wayne, there is nothing I can do for you. This blast will be too big.”

Wayne nodded, then hesitated, looking toward Harmony. “Will this … earn me forgiveness?”

“Oh, Wayne,” Harmony said. “You’ve heard this from Wax. You have to hear it from me too, I think. You can’t do this for forgiveness. You need *no* forgiveness, not anymore.”

And … he was right.

Wayne wasn’t doing this for forgiveness, or out of shame, or out of a need to prove himself. He *wasn’t* the man he’d been when Wax pulled him out of his hiding place. He was someone different.

“Wayne,” Harmony asked, “do you know who you are?”

“Yeah, I know who I am,” Wayne said. “I’m the *God. Damn. HERO.*” He paused. “Sorry.”

“Under the circumstances,” Harmony said, smiling, “I understand. Each of those barrels has a hole in the top, to draw in air once the explosion starts. The harmonium has been removed from its oil bath and is currently being heated. That means if you pour water in, it will detonate the harmonium. That will destroy the mechanism that heats up the bomb, and will prevent the much greater explosion. Once you pour, use your Allomancy to Push the barrel out of the speed bubble.”

“Right, then,” Wayne said. “I’m gonna need your hat.”

“My … hat?”

“Gotta sculpt a speed bubble just right,” Wayne said, “and put everything I have into the Push. Burn so much bendalloy in one moment, it practically melts me from the inside—slow time so much, even *electric signals* get dull.”

“I don’t wear a hat.”

“You’re God. Improvise somethin’.”

Harmony paused, then touched Wayne on the head. He felt it start to glow, as if something had been settled there. Earrings too. He felt earrings like a proper Terrisman wore. Something he’d maybe always been, just in secret.

It wasn’t nothin’ magical. But when he wore someone’s hat, he thought he could understand them. And who was better to understand than God himself?

“Good,” Wayne said, adopting the proper accent. Old-fashioned, but Terris. Like Harmony. He dropped his speed bubble and gathered his power. “Hold on to your robes, my dear friend. This is going to be unlike anything you have seen before, I think.”

* * *

Marasi strode toward Blantach’s constabulary offices, Armal and a few of her friends in her wake, through a dark city content with its own business. Ignorant of the crisis.

Yet she felt something in the mists. Wax always talked about them in this supernatural way, a way she rarely felt.

Tonight though, they seemed to be holding their breath.

* * *

Steris froze on the docks. Her workers and constables were still busy doing as she asked, but something felt … odd? About the moment? She turned toward the waters and looked out across the misty sea.

Gripping the little silver spear she wore at her neck, she said a prayer.

* * *

“Now!” Harmony said.

Wayne made the perfect speed bubble. Most Allomancers with his powers couldn’t change the shape of a bubble. But bendalloy was so expensive, people couldn’t really afford to practice.

He could. He’d probably done this more than any person alive. In that moment, he made a bubble that contained the three barrel devices—but had a hole to exclude the device on the wall that coordinated the explosions.

Then he burned duralumin and *Pushed*.

People didn’t often refer to speed bubbles and slowness bubbles as Pushing and Pulling, like they talked about Steelpushes and Ironpulls. But it was the same. What Wayne did, it was Pushing on reality itself. Distorting it, shoving it inward, warping it.

Today he Pushed harder than any person in history. He Pushed like a god, on account of wearing Sazed’s own hat. On account of that strange metal, and on account of Wayne bein’ the hero. Time squeezed in around him, compressed like coal bein’ made into rustin’ diamond. Further, further, as a whole damn stomach full of bendalloy was burned in an instant.

God himself froze. Standing motionless. The bubble crystallized into a visible sphere. Lights that had been blinking halted, half-on. Something funny even happened to his eyesight, everything going all strange until he took another vial of Harmony’s metals and burned steel to see that way instead.

Go.

Canteen in hand, Wayne flooded the first bomb. He ducked back as the water dripped, then Pushed that barrel right out of the speed bubble as the explosion started. It transfixed him momentarily, fire and light erupting from the barrel, all outlined in these strange blue lines. As if that barrel was releasing its soul to the afterlife.

Cracks started to appear in his crystallized speed bubble. Damn. Wayne leaped to the second barrel and poured, then Pushed it out too. It sent electric warnings up the wires—but the box that controlled the detonation was stuck in slow time, the signals moving like molasses.

Damn, how fast was he moving? And he'd thought he was getting slow because of old age. Heh.

He slammed into the third barrel and dumped the rest of the canteen's water out into it. He Pushed it, then turned, gazing out at all three barrels hanging motionless in time. He was going so fast, only the first one was exploding, and that because he'd taken the longest to Push it out. The blast was completely halted now.

He let out a breath and dropped the canteen. He'd been gobbled up, it was true. But when that happened, you strangled the monster from the inside.

His crystalline speed bubble shattered.

And all became red light and blossoms of fire.

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Wax struggled in the dark waters.

Then something erupted to his right. A flash of light, blinding and dazzling. Followed by a shock wave in the air, and another in the water. For both, he thought he glimpsed—briefly, through the omnipresent light—the sight of a figure dulling the wave directly in front of him. A calm Terrisman standing tall on the surface of the water, with one hand stretched forward.

Then, darkness again. Wax blinked, his eyes blinded by the blast. Debris rained around him. Splashing into the choppy waves.

In moments, Wax was struggling to stay afloat. He'd hit the water hard, and thought he'd broken at least one leg. Wayne, trying to save his life? That frustrating, infuriating …

… that wonderful man.

"Farewell, my friend," Wax whispered, choking on his emotion. "You incredible *rusting* man. Thank you."

As the waters grew more choppy, Wax had to struggle harder. He forced through pain, grief, and fatigue to keep himself—barely—afloat. He burned his steel, then … something else. Something deep within, which kept him warm.

Despite that, he was lost in darkness, and even the mists kept their distance. With his leg not working, with his coat dragging him down, with the exhaustion of a nation's hopes weighing on him, he felt himself begin to slip. Begin to lose his fight with the waters. Begin to …

What was *that*?

A tiny light, drifting closer. Small, yet unyielding in the mists. It resolved into … a lantern? On a small boat? How …

The boat motored right up to him, and then a man in a coachman’s outfit with white gloves stood up on the deck and reached out to Wax.

“Carriage,” Hoid said, “for you. Sir.”

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The shock wave hit Steris like a thunderclap. She gasped in surprise, her ears ringing from the sound of the detonation. Rusts.

She and the governor had been carried via Allomancer far into the center of the city—close to their original evacuation command post—following their efforts at the docks. But that obviously hadn't been far enough to escape completely. Around her, windows rattled. Any closer to the docks and they would have shattered. And the buildings nearest the explosion …

Fortunately, the only ill effects she felt—standing atop a building this far from the blast—was that shock wave. And so, after her initial panic, she watched that brilliant light in the distance slowly fade.

A moment ago, that explosion had been like a momentary sun on the horizon, magnificent and ominous all at once, blazing through the mists. Now, in seconds, all that remained were the afterimage and the faint ringing in her ears.

The governor peeked up over the rooftop's stone railing, where he'd ducked at the initial explosion. Then he stood up straight. "He's done it, hasn't he? Preservation! He's done it! He detonated the bomb early! The city is saved!"

Steris nodded, exhaling a long breath. Wax had been exactly where she'd hoped he would be. Now that she'd seen that light—then survived the detonation—a new worry struck her.

You’d *better not have been on that ship when the explosion happened, Waxillium Ladrian*, she thought. *You … just … just have gotten off, all right?*

“Will the tsunami come?” the governor said.

“Yes,” Steris said. “Imminently.”

“We … uh…” The governor straightened his cravat. “We *actually* helped, didn’t we?”

“Yes,” she said. “The dockside buildings are going to be a disaster zone in the weeks to come—we’ll need to rebuild. But I think we evacuated most people from the dangerous section.”

Water was pulling back rapidly from the docks as she watched. Receding in advance of a tsunami. Hopefully it would not be a big one. The studies she’d read were inconclusive about how water would react to explosions.

“Thank the Survivor,” the governor said. “I’m … glad you let us retreat. I worried you’d insist on staying by the docks.”

“There is no need to go down with the city,” Steris said, “if the city isn’t going down.”

He nodded eagerly. He was actually quite an agreeable man. Which made sense. He’d been chosen by people who wanted to steer him. People who’d never expected him to put his hands on the helm and take control.

She blinked, her eyes bearing the afterimage of that explosion.

Just … be safe … Steris thought toward that distant, now faded, point of light. *Please.*

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Wayne floated.

Floated someplace high. Damn. Was that the planet *itself* beneath him? It *was* a sphere, as everyone said. He'd always hoped maybe it would be, like, doughnut shaped or something. To throw the smart folks for a loop.

Felt kinda strange to be all the way up here, in the darkness. He leaned forward and felt a disorientation, like he should be falling. He was woozy, unsteady.

Huh. Who'd have thought being dead would be so much like being drunk? He could write a whole damn book of scripture about that, he could.

A figure hovered next to him. Vast. His robes like the infinite colors of creation, his essence seeming to expand into the darkness of space itself. But at his core, he had the appearance of a bald, kindly Terrisman.

"Hey, God," Wayne said. "How's … um … creation? Time and space? Reality? You know, things?"

"Good," Harmony replied. "Because of you."

"Now wait," Wayne said. "I ain't gonna be a *ghost,* am I?"

"No. You were Invested when you died, so you will persist a short time, but will soon join the Beyond."

"Good, good."

"You don't find that idea concerning?"

"Hell no," Wayne said. "I *already* done gone and died. That was the part that I worried would hurt." He gaped down at the planet below. "It's so *big.*"

“Yes, Wayne,” Harmony said. “I realize that a person might become intimidated, seeing all this. Recognizing the vastness of what they’ve lived upon. It is a lot to take in, I think. It can make a person feel small, insignificant, and—”

Wayne grinned. “And I saved the whole damn thing!”

Harmony paused. “Well, I suppose you did. With some help from Marasi and Waxillium.” Harmony gestured toward a red haze, swirling away from the planet as if in a funnel, vanishing into the distance.

Wayne felt something from it. An angry sort of respect. Begrudging. Her avatar had been defeated, and so Autonomy withdrew her touch from the planet.

“Is that it, then?” Wayne asked.

“For now,” Harmony said. “She was overextending to try to bring us down quickly, I think. Telsin and the Set’s failure is an enormous setback, and Marasi was quick to collapse the portal to this planet. My vision returns, and I will try to take care I am not blindsided again.”

“You sound afraid?” Wayne said, cocking his head.

“Nervous,” Harmony said, his expression distant. “I can see pieces moving in the cosmere. Aligning. Pointed at us. We are not free of their influence. But we have … time, now. Time to prepare. Thanks to you, Wayne.”

“Me,” Wayne said. “I saved the *whole damn world.* I … I’m probably the best constable who ever rusting lived!”

“I … suppose…” Harmony said, “that Vin, Elend, and the others weren’t constables…”

“Wax ain’t never saved the whole world. And most of the others in the octant constabulary? They couldn’t save a coupon for free beer, even when I gave it to them. Stupid kandra giraffe man. Wayne, the best conner in the whole damn world … Ha! Eat that, Reddi. Eat it with hot sauce and *cry*!”

Wayne felt something happening as he said it, though. A kind of … stretching feeling. Like he was being pulled somewhere. Somewhere … warm?

“Before you go,” Harmony said, “is there anything you would like to know? I’m not truly omniscient, but my knowledge far surpasses that of mortals. Some have a final question for me before they go. Have you such a request, Wayne?"

Huh. Any question? That was a hard one. He pondered a moment. "So," he said, "before she left, MeLaan told me that I was the best lay she ever had, and I was wondering—"

"Wayne," God interrupted, "what is it Ranette always says to you?"

"Try dodging this?"

"The other thing."

"Don't ruin the moment by bein' all skeevy?"

"Yes, that one."

"Right, right," Wayne said, nodding. "Good point. Good point. You're smart, maybe even as smart as Ranette. Suppose that makes sense and all." He continued to think, though that stretching sensation … it was getting stronger. What could he ask? What …

Then he grinned. That was *perfect.*

"I'm gonna assume Wax and them will be fine," Wayne said. "You already promised that. So I ain't going to waste a question on them. And you can't trick me into doing so. You'll take care of them. I know you will."

"To the best of my ability," Harmony said.

"Good. Then tell me this, God," Wayne said, pointing at him. "Was that the *biggest damn explosion* a person ever made?"

Harmony raised an eyebrow. "*That's* your last question? Your final request of God before you pass into eternity?"

"Hell yes! Figure now that I'm dead, I'll get the other answers right soon. You ain't going to trick me into asking a useless question. So tell me. Was it?"

Harmony smiled. "Ah, Wayne. I suppose that most other things that could rival it—like the detonations of the Ashmounts—would be categorized as acts of God. Therefore, I declare that it is. Yes, Wayne. You exploded yourself in the biggest *damn* explosion a person has ever made in the history of our planet."

"Make sure Steris knows," Wayne said, grinning. "She's always complainin' about my exploding things. This time I saved her hide by doin' it. Plus, I made the explosion *smaller.* That’s gonna break her brain. I made it smaller, and it was still the biggest one what ever was.”

He felt himself really going now. So, he held out a hand to God. Who, smiling, shook it.

“I knew you’d glow,” Wayne said, with a wink.

With that, Wayne stretched into another place, into another time. He stretched into the wind. And into the stars.

And all endless things.

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EPILOGUES

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MARASI

TEN HOURS AFTER DETONATION

Somehow, the sun was already rising again when Marasi stumbled off the train in Elendel. She might have expected the train to be empty, considering the disasters—both prevented and diminished—that had marked the night.

Yet the train was packed. Some traveling to aid those in the waterlogged and broken northwestern quarter of Elendel. Others coming to check on family. Others returning home from the evacuation to seek a place of comfort in this strange time.

She let them swarm around her as she stood on the train platform, feeling disjointed. Out of place. Part of that was fatigue. She'd had perhaps two hours' sleep back in Bilming, after coordinating with Constable Blantach, who had finally accepted the evidence of Entrone's malfeasance. The testimonies of the people who Marasi and the others had saved—especially the journalists and politicians who TwinSoul had escorted out—would prove vital.

It felt wrong to leave the lord mayor and his remaining accomplices in the hands of a constabulary department that had up until recently answered to him. But honestly, Marasi wasn't certain what else she could do. An Elendel invasion of Bilming wasn't feasible, considering the disasters and the political situation. She simply had to hope that the testimonies, the explosion, and the overwhelming physical evidence would be enough to force the Bilming constables to do their jobs.

At the least, it seemed that Wax and Wayne had left the Set’s organizational structure—and military forces—in shambles. They’d found Telsin dead on the top of the Shaw. Written, by her own fingernail, on the strangely grey skin of her arm had been the words:

You have proven yourselves. For now.

The way her god had left her was eerily reminiscent of how the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor had been discovered at the end of the Catacendre. Strangely peaceful, and …

And rusts, Marasi was zoning out. Standing there as confused as a Roughs bumpkin her first time in the city. She forced herself to start walking, moving with the last straggling passengers to leave the train. She needed a bath. She needed something to eat. And she needed …

A frantic masked figure burst from the crowd ahead, having fought his way against the flow of traffic. She wasn’t certain how he’d talked his way through the ticket gate, but Marasi finally let herself feel a measure of comfort as Allik crashed into her with a powerful embrace.

This, she thought as he held her tight, *was what it was for.* This and a million other people. But to her … it had been for this most of all.

Allik pulled back and raised his mask. He’d been crying.

“It’s all right,” Marasi said, wiping his tears away. “Allik, I’m fine. I promise. I thought you were outside the city?”

“I returned early,” he said. “And these tears aren’t for you, love. We tried to get word to you, but … it was chaotic, and the lines were busy…”

Her world started to crack. “Who?” she whispered.

“Wayne,” he said.

No. It was impossible.

Wayne was practically immortal. He was like … like a rock. The kind you got in your shoe and couldn’t get rid of.

No … no, he was the kind you leaned against. When you needed something stable. He …

He was her partner.

She knew their job was dangerous. She knew they risked their lives each day. Still, she’d always assumed she would be the one who … who …

“Wax?” she choked out.

“Fine,” Allik said. “Well, all but one leg, yah? But he will heal up.” He winced. “He says … Wayne stayed behind. Detonated the bomb. To save the city…”

She grabbed him then, because that break in his voice matched the one she felt inside her, and she needed to hold to something. As they embraced, she felt grief welling up to destroy her.

She … she wouldn’t accept it. She wouldn’t believe he was gone. He’d … he’d survived worse than this. She would come home one day and he’d be sitting in her kitchen helping himself to the chocolate.

And if that never happened?

I can’t deal with that right now, she thought. *Not on two hours of sleep.*

She let the delusion linger. So it could erode, like a stone in the waves, over time.

Allik took her by the shoulders. “You,” he declared, “look like you are in need of copious amounts of baked goods. Delivered with an urgency rivaling that of a warleader in battle. Yah?”

“Yah,” she said, embracing him again. “A thousand times yah, Allik.”

* * *

An hour later—full of exotic cakes and biscuits—Marasi snuggled in the overstuffed chair of her small flat. She’d finally changed, but not into pajamas. Instead she wore her uniform. Long skirt, blouse, constable’s overcoat.

Allik had given that an odd glance before he’d slipped out—with characteristic apologies—to buy a bottle of wine. The thing was, as tired as Marasi had felt, another emotion dominated. A sense of displacement. An awareness that something was *wrong.*

She was struggling to deal with the idea that Wayne was dead. Most of her refused to believe, for her own sanity. That was part of it. There was another part though. A sense that something was unfinished, that a question hung in the balance. One she had to answer before she could truly rest.

So it was no great surprise that soon after Allik left, a knock sounded at the door. It was a young messenger girl, of the variety you could easily hire in town for a few clips. They knew the ins and outs of the many tenements, apartments, and winding streets of the octants better than most postmen.

The girl delivered a small envelope before scampering off. Inside was a card with the symbol of the interlocking triangles. The Ghostbloods. There was an address on the back.

Marasi checked her things. Credentials in her pocket. Handgun in the holster at her side. Insignia on her jacket. She didn’t bring a rifle. Today, she didn’t need to be armed so much as equipped.

She left a quick note for Allik, promising to return soon, then made her way out into the city. Her city.

She loved Elendel. The sheer variety of people. The way that the broadsheets were already selling the story of the detonation. Some called it a warning shot from the Outer Cities, others a deliberate attempt to cause a flood—as if blowing the city up wouldn’t have been a more effective choice. A surprising number actually had the right facts.

DAWNSHOT AND DEPUTY SAVE DAY.

DARING LAST-MINUTE RACE TO SAVE ELENDEL!

BILMING BOMB PREMATURELY DETONATED BY CONSTABLE COURAGE!

She wondered what they’d say when they got hold of her story. A hidden cavern full of kidnapped people being used to try to create Mistborn? Moving photos and Hemalurgic monsters? It was the sort of thing that would fuel broadsheet stories for decades.

She strolled toward her destination. Savoring the scents—good and bad, but always potent—the sounds, the *feel* of a city so alive that even a disaster couldn’t stop it.

The Ghostblood base in Elendel was more ostentatious than the one in Bilming. A grand old-school estate, with stained glass and manicured grounds. Marasi was ushered in without needing to knock, then led to a dimly lit room. She assumed she was to sit here and wait, until she noticed someone at the far side. Seated in a comfortable—but enveloping—chair, fine shoes catching the light, his face lost in shadows. But one feature was plain: a single spike pushed through his right eye.

The Survivor himself.

She'd met Death, chatted with kandra, heard Wax speak of Harmony. She was no newcomer to figures from lore stepping out of shadow and into her life. This was different somehow. This was the man who had started it all. The man who had survived his own murder. This was the man she'd been taught to worship and revere.

Here he was. And it was the most intimidating experience of her life. She tried to speak, and found her mouth dry.

The door opened and TwinSoul entered, stabilizing himself against the door handle. Though she'd known him only a short time, it still felt right to give him a hug, which he returned.

"It is good to see you well, my lady," he said to her. "And to hear of your accomplishments."

"Oh!" Marasi said. "TwinSoul. Moonlight, she—"

"We've heard reports," TwinSoul said. "She was … forced to use her stamp?"

"Yes," Marasi said.

"She will be difficult to recover," Kelsier said from the shadows. "I may have permanently lost my best agent to this fiasco."

Marasi's first instinct was to rush to apologize. She stopped herself. "You'd rather we let the invasion happen?"

Kelsier leaned forward, and she thought she caught a hint of a *smile* on his lips. Perhaps the stories were true. That he might be a brutal man, but he wasn't a *stern* one. But who knew? Could you really trust stories from hundreds of years ago? And if you could, surely a man changed after living—or, well, not staying dead—for four centuries.

"Go ahead, TwinSoul," Kelsier said.

"Marasi Colms," TwinSoul said, "I am proud to offer you membership in the Ghostbloods. If you accept, I would be honored to become your mentor, as is our tradition. You may join me on my next mission, to track Moonlight down and attempt to restore her natural personality."

"This offer comes with access to everything the Ghostbloods know," Kelsier said. "We don't keep secrets from one another."

"Even you, Survivor?" Marasi asked, curious. "Do *you* keep secrets?"

He didn't respond to that. But he did smile again.

“There is lore and arcana we have access to,” TwinSoul said, “that will delight and awe you, my lady. Our duties lead us to fascinating places—all in the service of the very thing you want: protecting Scadrial.”

“It is not an invitation,” Kelsier added, “that we extend lightly.”

So here it was. The question. Did she accept? Lately, she’d wanted so badly to do something more. Every glimpse she got of the larger conflicts—the larger cosmere—made her want to see it in full. Like a woman peeking at a sunset through a slit in the wall.

And yet.

“How long,” she said, “did you know about the Set? How long did you know what they were trying to do? Who Trell was?”

Silence.

“We provide answers,” TwinSoul said, “*after* oaths, my lady. It is our way.”

“Did you share with Harmony?” Marasi asked.

“Saze,” Kelsier said, “is … erratic lately. There’s a problem brewing with him. One I fear is going to make even today’s events seem trivial by comparison. We must, unfortunately, work in secret. We are too small, too weak, as of yet. In the open, forces in the cosmere would crush us.”

She didn’t disagree, not entirely. Every lawwoman understood the need to work covertly at times.

And yet.

Marasi turned their card over in her fingers, then held it up and looked at the interlocking bloodred diamonds.

Was this really what she wanted? She’d been dissatisfied in her service on occasion. But was there any job you *didn’t* dislike now and then? As she turned the card over again, she remembered why she’d first become a constable. Not just to solve crimes. To solve problems. To make the world a better place, not merely protect it.

She couldn’t do that from the shadows, could she? Others might be able to, but Marasi? She’d have to lie to so many people. That violated the fundamental oaths she’d taken.

Have you appreciated it? Armal had asked. That question haunted Marasi.

“Once,” she said, “about seven years ago, I thought everything I’d ever wanted had fallen into my lap. I *thought* I’d figured out what I wanted. Then he walked away. That rejection was among the best things that ever happened to me.”

“My lady?” TwinSoul said.

“I guess,” Marasi continued, “it’s hard to know what you want. We never have all the information. We merely have to do what we can with what we have.” She met Kelsier’s shadowed gaze. “If I join, will you let me share what I discover with the constabulary?”

“What do you think?” Kelsier asked.

“I think,” she said, “that I am a servant of the people.” She moved to set the card on the table beside the door. “That any power or authority I have comes from them. They are not served by darkness and lies, no matter how well intentioned.”

“Be careful,” Kelsier said before she could put the card down. “Are you *certain* this is what you want?”

“No,” she said. “My job isn’t to be certain. My job is to do the best I can. Even with limited information.” She dropped the card.

She still needed to find something. An answer for herself. But this *wasn’t* it.

“I’m a servant of the government,” Marasi said, “and of the law. Things that you, I believe, have historically had a problem with, Survivor. I appreciate your help on this mission. I’d accept it again in the future.” She shook her head. “But I’m not a good match for your organization. I won’t keep secrets when the truth could save lives.”

She needed to know what was hidden here—but she was a detective. She’d find answers without selling her soul. Even if it was to the Survivor himself.

Kelsier did not seem like the type of man who appreciated being rejected. But he did eventually nod in acceptance. She shook hands with TwinSoul, offered to help him with Moonlight anyway, then let herself out.

Back into the city.

Back to the people of Elendel.

And as she walked among them—hearing their concerns, their fears, their uncertainty—she remembered things she'd lost to the doldrums of daily work. Plans for her life she'd followed for years, but had eventually grown beyond.

Had she grown back into them, then? Wiser, more understanding, more nuanced?

It was then, wrung out and exhausted, yet victorious, that she realized what she wanted.

All she needed was a plan.

* * *

Prasanva—TwinSoul—watched her go, then shook his head. Unfortunate. And also remarkable. He liked seeing people uphold their personal codes. The aethers, after all, had created all people to think differently from one another.

As the main hallway door shut outside—and Marasi Colms left—Dlavil eased from the shadows behind Kelsier's seat. The short man bore an intricate and fearsome mask, wooden and painted—but when he spoke, his accent was not that of the Southern Scadrians. It was of Silverlight.

"We will need to deal with her," Dlavil said softly.

"She is a woman of integrity," TwinSoul said. "I will not permit harm to come to her."

"She knows our secrets," Dlavil said. "She knows this base. She saw what you and Moonlight can do. She glimpsed the maps, the powers, the knowledge. She is dangerous to us now."

"We offered these things freely," TwinSoul said, "and although she rejected us, she did *not* take from us. Master Kelsier, rein him in."

"Enough, Dlavil," Kelsier said, flicking on the light and leaning back in his seat. "TwinSoul is right. She knows nothing that couldn't be learned from a cursory exploration of the cosmere. We might have to move bases, but that's our own fault. Moonlight was so certain she'd join."

Dlavil held his tongue, his eyes inscrutable behind that cursed mask. TwinSoul hated being unable to get a full read on the man's expressions, but Dlavil—like his sister who ran amok on Roshar—wore a mask that he never removed; it was grown in to the point that it was practically part of his skin.

“I mean it, Dlavil,” Kelsier said. “You will *not* move against her, or anyone in this city, without my permission. You understand?”

“Yes, Lord Kelsier,” Dlavil said, and withdrew through the back door.

Kelsier sighed audibly, rising from his seat. He joined TwinSoul beside the window, where they looked out at the city.

“Good work yesterday,” Kelsier told him. “Very good work, old friend. We almost lost everything.”

TwinSoul bowed his head in acceptance of the praise. It felt good.

You are blessed, Silajana said in his mind. *And worthy of commendation.*

That felt even better.

“It should never have gotten this far,” Kelsier said. “Something *is* wrong with Sazed. It’s getting worse.”

“What do we do, my lord?” TwinSoul asked.

Kelsier narrowed his eye. “I,” he whispered softly, “am going to have to have a difficult conversation with ‘God.’”

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STERIS

TWO DAYS AFTER DETONATION

On the second day of the city’s recovery, Steris finally got to bring Waxillium home from the hospital. They limped out of Hoid’s car, Wax on crutches, then looked up at the enormous skyscraper that held their suite. Wax stared at it, his eyes faintly haunted.

“Thinking of the Shaw?” Steris asked softly.

He nodded. “On that rooftop, Wayne made me get him a spike. If I hadn’t listened, he wouldn’t have been able to Push me away.”

“So you could have done what?” she said gently. “Stayed with him to die? He knew what he needed to do.”

Wax looked to her, and she saw the same pain in his eyes that she’d seen after Lessie’s second death. Tempered this time, but haunting nonetheless. She hated seeing him in pain. It happened far too often.

“I should have at least said goodbye,” Wax whispered. “He left the Roughs because of me…”

“And he lived because you gave him a second chance,” Steris said. As he was staring up at the roof, she covertly consulted her notes from the books on trauma she’d been reading. “This wasn’t your fault, Waxillium. You need to allow Wayne his agency, allow him to have made his own choice. You would have sacrificed yourself for the city; we both know it. So let *him* have the same decision.”

He was silent for a moment, and she tried—anxiously—to figure out what he was feeling. Was that scrunched-up face annoyance? Or was it pain? Ruin, had she made it worse?

"You're right," he said softly, then blinked tears from his eyes. "You're right, Steris. I need to let him be the hero, don't I? Harmony … he really *is* gone."

She slipped her notebook into her pocket and held him close, ignoring the world around them. She dimmed everything else, like an old gas lantern with a dial. Turned it down until only the two of them remained. Only the two of them mattered.

He held to her, then took a long, deep breath. "Marasi still doesn't believe he's gone. She thinks he's going to come sauntering back in a few months, wearing a straw hat and telling us how great the fruity drinks are in the Malwish Consortium. But she's wrong. This time it's over."

"Yes," Steris whispered. "He's gone. But *nothing* is *over,* Wax. You said the same thing when Lessie died. It wasn't true then. It's not true now. It will take time for you to believe, but you can trust that it will happen."

He squeezed her hand. "Again, you're right. How *did* you get so good at this, Steris?"

"I learned from Wayne."

"About … helping people deal with pain?"

"No," she said, then slipped out her notebook. "About cheating."

Waxillium smiled. The first genuine one she'd seen from him since the incident. Then he handed her his crutches and dropped a spent bullet casing to the ground.

"Oh!" she said. "Are you sure this is wise?"

"I might be getting old, but I'm not frail," he said, then grabbed hold of her. "You ready?"

"Always," she said, feeling an exquisite thrill from anticipating the flight. She leaned into him.

He propelled them upward, using the metal installations he'd had erected here to give him a series of appropriate anchors. A rushing, exhilarating ascent with wind in her hair, and the insignificant world became more tiny. Until it was only the two of them and the sky.

Wax landed them carefully on the platform outside their suite. As he took back his crutches, Steris fished for her notebook.

“I think…” Wax said. “I think I’m going to be all right.”

“Good,” she said, flipping a few pages. “I have a Wayne quote for the moment.”

“A what?”

“I figured,” she said, “it would be a way of remembering him. To keep a few appropriate lines handy. Is that … morbid? That’s morbid, isn’t it? I’m sorry.”

“No,” he said. “I mean, it might be, but he’d approve.”

She grinned. “‘Oi,’” she said. “‘Here you carried a girl all that way, mate, and you didn’t grab ’er butt, even a little?’”

“You just made that one up.”

She proffered the notebook, showing the line written there.

“Well, I mean,” Wax said, “we’ve got to do as he says.”

“It’s the only proper way to honor the dead.”

He seized her then, pulled her into a kiss, her figure sculpting to his and pushing against him in all the right places. It felt amazing—like they were liquid, aligned, alive, alight.

And yes, a proper butt-grab was involved. It almost toppled them to the side, unbalancing Wax on his good leg. They broke the kiss before an accident could befall them, but stayed close.

“Thank you,” Wax whispered. “For being you.”

“It’s the only thing I am good at,” she said. “Other than throwing cows at people.”

Wax frowned.

“That is something Wayne said on occasion,” she said.

In response to that, he looked to the sky. “Thank you, Wayne. Wherever you are. For letting me have this. For *making* me live.”

She forced him inside then, so he could sit. He wasn’t supposed to put weight on that leg, cast or no cast. Even if he could cheat by making himself lighter.

Unfortunately, Kath had been a little quicker than she’d expected, and the kids were already back from the Harms estate down-Basin. So Wax, in flagrant disregard for medical instructions, knelt and scooped Max up in an embrace.

"Daddy!" Max said. "You did it! Kath says you did it!"

"Did it?" he asked.

"Stopped the bad guys! Saved the world!"

"I suppose," Wax said, "I did a little of both. Wayne helped a lot though."

"Jennid at school," Max continued, "says that you're *also* supposed to get the girl when you save the world. But that part is stupid. I don't like girls."

"What?" Wax said. "Not even Mommy?"

"Dad," Max said, with an exaggerated sense of long-suffering—as if this were the most obvious thing a boy had ever had to describe. "Mommy's not a *girl,* she's a *mom.*"

Steris smiled, moving over by Kath as Wax took little Tindwyl and held her tight, letting her grab at his sideburns.

"This came for you," Kath said softly, taking a letter from her handbag. "A short time ago. It looked important."

"Thank you," Steris said, taking the letter—which was addressed to her—and noting the governor's seal on the front.

Her panic was immediate. She'd worried about this. She'd written down the possibility, but surely it wouldn't … it couldn't …

She ripped it open, her hands shaking with terror. He'd need a new vice governor, now that he'd formally fired Adawathwyn. *Surely* he wouldn't …

> *Dear Steris Harms Ladrian,*
>
> *I would like to meet with you and discuss a possible appointment in my government. Considering your invaluable service during the recent crisis—*

Oh no. Oh *no*. Not that.

> *—I have decided to ask you to accept a position as the city's Disaster Preparations Officer. I would assign you a seat on my council and*

> *provide a task force for your use, ensuring the city is prepared and outfitted for any and all potential disasters or relevant dangers.*
>
> *Please reply with times that will work for you, so we can sit down and talk. On a more personal level, I'd like to give you my most sincere thanks. I am being hailed as a hero and a decisive leader. I would not deserve either of those accolades without your intervention.*

Disaster … Preparations Officer?

She blinked.

Why … that wasn't terrifying at all.

That might actually be *fun.*

Wax gave Tindwyl to Kath, then hobbled over to Steris—nodding passively as Max explained at length about the new marbles game he'd been playing. Looking over her shoulder, Wax read the letter, then took her by the elbow.

"Steris," he said, "that's *wonderful.*"

"I don't deserve it," she said. "The tsunami wasn't nearly as bad as I'd feared it would be."

"Love," Wax said, "you *do* deserve it."

She turned to look him in the eyes.

"What if instead of quoting Wayne," he said softly, "we honored him in a different way. What if we decided to make an effort to let ourselves be happy? What do you think of that, Lady Ladrian?"

"I think, Lord Ladrian, I should like that very, *very* much."

And she could already imagine an entire list of plans to make certain it happened.

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ALLRIANDRE

FIVE DAYS AFTER DETONATION

Allriandre climbed the steps one at a time. Feet like lead. Legs like slag. Back bowed, as if weighed by bars of steel. Her ashen clothing bore a few new marks from the forges, which threw sparks when she passed. Her job didn't involve working those—she sorted bits of metal for melting down.

When she arrived at her small flat—on the seventh floor, in a building with no elevator—she could already hear Miss Coussaint yelling. Despite her exhaustion, Allriandre picked up her pace. She hurried to the door and threw it open, to where her daughter, Ruri—three years old and still small for her age—huddled in her blankets. Terrified again.

"Why would you think *toothpaste* was for *drawing*?" Miss Coussaint shouted. She was a woman with a hierarchy of chins, the last—most swollen—one lording over the others like a terrible regent. She glanced up as Allriandre entered, then held up the toothpaste jar. "Did you *see* what she did *this time*?"

"I'm sorry," Allriandre said, exhausted, but she scooped up Ruri as she came running into her arms to escape. "Thank you for watching her."

Coussaint looked her up and down, noting the dirty face, scraggly hair, burned clothing. "Rent?" she demanded. "It's been three days."

"He's never been late with a payment before." Wayne, the man who'd murdered her father. "I'm sure he'll show up soon."

“I need to do some renovations,” Coussaint said. “Maybe when he comes, you can—”

“Thank you, Miss Coussaint,” Allriandre said, stepping aside so the woman could leave. “For watching her. It is an enormous help.”

The woman huffed, but squeezed out of the room and went clomping down the steps. Allriandre pulled her daughter close, and thought for a moment about her choices. About how the best schooling in the city didn’t mean much when you were in debt to the wrong people. About how something you loved so much—like the girl she held to now—could also be a reminder of one of the greatest mistakes you’d ever made.

She was exhausted, but she plopped Ruri down, and together the two of them painted with toothpaste on the wall until the girl was laughing again. Until Ruri understood that mistakes could sometimes turn into amazing, wonderful, cherished things. With the right perspective.

A knock came at the door.

Allriandre froze, then quickly wiped her hands on a rag. She hadn’t been expecting anyone. Rusts, she barely *knew* anyone. All of her university friends had gone on to marriages, office jobs, and nights spent socializing. Her family still lived out in the Roughs, and she’d made sure they didn’t know what had happened to her. Because they had their own problems.

She opened the door hesitantly and saw two men in suits outside— one tall, one short. Her stomach immediately dropped. Were these Bleaker’s new collection men? They usually showed up a week *after* she received her monthly payment.

“Miss Allriandre?” the shorter of the men asked. “I am Mister Call, and this is Mister Daring, of Call and Son and Daughters Accounting and Estate. Might we come in? We have a matter of some importance to discuss with you.”

“I don’t have the money yet,” she said quickly. “I can’t pay you until I do. There’s nothing in here for you to take.”

The two shared a glance, then the shorter man gestured again. She reluctantly let them in.

“If you,” she whispered, “hurt my daughter…”

“We are not who you appear to think we are,” the taller man said with a cheerful air, looking at the toothpaste-covered wall, then the ragged furnishings. “We represent the estate of Master Wayne Terrisborn of 662 Inkling Lane.”

“Oh,” she said, feeling relieved. “Him. Wait. Did he finally get smart and decide to stop insisting that I meet him in person?”

“Indeed he did,” the taller man said, setting his bowler hat on the counter. She winced, noticing the mushed-up apple Ruri had dropped there. The little girl came and climbed into her arms. Strangers made her nervous.

“Why are you late?” Allriandre asked. “His payments always come on the first of the month.”

The taller one coughed. “You haven’t heard? You … don’t read the broadsheets?”

“Do I *look* like I have time for broadsheets?” she asked. “If you have my payment, that’s great. I could use it. But I *really* need some sleep. So…”

“Miss Allriandre,” the shorter man said, “Master Wayne passed last week. It was quite spectacular—he was the one who detonated the bomb. Did you hear about that?”

She’d heard rumblings of it at the forges. Not his part in it. But the whole flood and, and the evacuations … and … Wait.

“He’s dead?” she asked.

They nodded.

Rusts. How did she feel about that? Happy? The man who had killed her father was finally dead. She should be overjoyed, shouldn’t she?

Instead she felt confused. A little angry still, yes. That would never leave her. A hint of relief. But mostly … sorry. Sorry for how it had all turned out. Sorry that wounds long dulled sent a pang through her now and then. Sorry for mistakes. Mistakes didn’t always turn into something better, not by a long mile. But she could understand now how they happened. Even the big ones.

The taller man set a large folder onto the room’s only table. “Shall we?” he asked.

“Shall we what?” she replied.

“Miss Allriandre,” the shorter man said, “you are the primary beneficiary of Master Wayne’s estate.”

“What’s that amount to?” she asked. “Three balls of gum and an unpaid bar tab?”

“Currently,” the tall one said, “it’s twenty million boxings—liquid—along with majority stake ownerships in several important holdings, equating to at least another hundred.”

The room fell silent save for Ruri’s sniffling, which the girl solved by wiping her nose on Allriandre’s jumpsuit. Allriandre barely noticed.

“Did you say … *a hundred and twenty million*?” she whispered.

“Give or take, depending on the market,” the taller man said. “He invested wisely—in a brilliant way, actually, against most conventional wisdom—using a considerable amount of aluminum as collateral. Turns out electricity, fabrication, and power were the place to be six years ago.”

The shorter man pulled over a chair for her. “Please,” he said softly. “Sit down. We have some things to go over.”

“A *hundred and twenty million,*” she repeated, her eyes wide, barely able to think. Her debts—from her failed art studio—equated to barely ten thousand.

“Yes,” the taller man said, setting out some papers. “By my estimation, you have become the fourth-richest person in the city.” He looked up. “There are a few holdbacks, mind you. Accounts that Master Wayne set aside for other things. But that equates to less than five hundred thousand in total. Everything else … well, it’s yours.”

She sank down into the chair.

The short man pushed over a note. Handwritten, stained with something. “He wanted you to have this.”

It simply said, *Sorry.*

As if that could explain all of this. Overwhelmed, she took the note, then held it close to her chest. With money, she could bring her family to Elendel. Resolve their problems. Build the life for them all that she’d promised when they’d put everything into sending her to the city.

Ruri grabbed at the card, getting toothpaste on it.

“What are the holdbacks for?” Allriandre asked. “Not that I’m complaining. I’m merely curious.”

The two shared a look.

“Various things,” the shorter man said. “Each one of an … individual nature.”

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KELSIER

THREE WEEKS AFTER DETONATION

Kelsier, the Survivor, liked high places. Fortunately, the city as it had become contained plenty of them.

He was one of the few who could remember a time when the grand keeps of Luthadel had been considered lofty, stretching up sixteens of feet into the air. Today they would be quaint compared to the city's dominating skyscrapers. The monoliths of modernity.

Kelsier didn't see quite as he once had. One eye saw as a mortal, the other as an immortal. His spiked eye not only pinned his soul to his bones, but gave him a constant overlay of blue, letting him see the world as a being like Sazed did. Outlining not only sources of metal, but all things. The very axi that made up matter had their own polarity, influenceable with Steelpushing under the right circumstances.

One eye of the gods. One eye of the common men. As he had always tried to see the world.

He had a spectacular view from the top of the skyscraper today. He could remember the joy, the *freedom* he'd felt all those years ago when he'd first crested the top of the mists and seen the stars. Now, those stars were naked and bare most nights. Even if the mists were out, it wasn't too hard to find a building that reached up beyond them, presenting them to full view. Stars. Suns. Planets.

Each one a potential threat.

A figure walked along the edge of the skyscraper's top toward Kelsier. Harmony wasn't accompanied by his dark double, the shadowy version that sometimes appeared these days. A representation of his other self.

"Marsh is going to live," Sazed said, settling down beside Kelsier. If you didn't look directly at him, you could *almost* ignore the fact that his essence extended into eternity.

Sazed spoke like he always had, though he was literally a god now. Kelsier wasn't certain if that was because Harmony presented a personality that was familiar to Kelsier, to put him at ease. Or if the man who had once been Kelsier's friend was actually the same person somehow.

"Marsh will live," Kelsier said, musing. "Does that mean we have atium again? Or did you find another way?"

"The kandra found atium dust in Waxillium's destroyed laboratory," Sazed said. "It appears that if you detonate harmonium against trellium—or, I suppose bavadinium would be its true name—it creates some small amount of atium as a by-product."

"Lerasium?" Kelsier asked.

"I'm sorry. That is all annihilated in the explosion. We've tested it several times now."

Damn. Another dead end.

"It wouldn't work on you anyway," Sazed said. "Not in your current state."

"Doesn't matter, Saze," Kelsier said. "We need Allomancers—*real* Allomancers, like in the old days—to face what is coming. This problem with Trell never would have happened if we'd had proper Metalborn."

"So you agree with the Set?" Sazed said. "And their monstrous undertakings in the name of creating Metalborn?"

Did he? It was difficult to say. Sometimes to make an omelet, you had to break a few skulls. He didn't like what the Set had done to innocent people, and would never condone such actions. But if Hemalurgy was demanded, there was always someone around who was the strict *opposite* of innocent.

"You don't know where the Set's experiments could have led," Sazed said. "Even the simple act of trying to breed Allomancers … it leads to darkness, Kell. Trying to create perfect people through forced breeding? You don’t have to be Terris to find that idea nauseating.”

“Perhaps Ruin and Preservation should have thought about that before giving genetically derived powers to only part of the population. My goal is to democratize this. Take the power away from the few, give it to the many.”

Lerasium would have been the easiest way, but it seemed he would have to keep hunting. That gave him hope for himself though. Lerasium wouldn’t have worked on him, and Hemalurgy had proven ineffective on what he’d become. It held his soul and body together, but no more.

There had to be another way. He had hope. Ever, he had hope. Hope he could control the metals again. Hope he would be able to soar again. Hope he’d be able to touch the metals he could see in the world all around him.

The two sat in silence for a time. They did that more and more, during their infrequent meetings. Perhaps because both knew it was better than arguing.

“I’m fond of heights,” Kelsier eventually said. “More so than when I was fully mortal. Perhaps a part of me holds a grudge against the ground, and what she did to me in those caves. Maybe I just try to get as far from her as possible.” He paused. “Explosions to make atium. I wonder if there will ever be a way to get it that *isn’t* traumatic.”

Sazed didn’t reply.

“How could you let it get this far, Saze?” Kelsier eventually asked. “This was almost the end.”

“I had it in hand.”

“Like hell you did. You’re lucky that lawman could function after what you put him through six years ago. Lucky that the other one was a Slider. I still can’t figure out how he managed that partial detonation in the ship’s hold.”

“Luck is a different thing for a god who can see futures, I think,” Sazed replied softly.

“Immaterial. This ran to the last minute. You should have stopped Trell *years* ago. But you didn’t. Why?”

Sazed stared out over the city. Beyond the city. To things Kelsier couldn't see, even with the eye of a god.

"You can't protect this world, Saze," Kelsier said. "We have to face it. Something's happening to you."

"I have it in hand."

"Do you? Do you *really*?"

Sazed remained there, seated, with his eyes closed. And damn, looking at him was disorienting. On the surface was his friend, the calm Terrisman. But he *extended.* Somehow he was the very stone they were sitting on. The city. The planet. And *beyond.*

And there was a darkness within him. A different face from the one he showed. The powers were in imbalance. Ruin had always been stronger.

"What would you have me do?" Sazed asked.

"There are potential allies out there," Kelsier said. "Moonlight's world, perhaps. Or the land of the aethers. Hell, maybe even Mythos. We need a way to reach them."

"Shadesmar—"

"Is unreliable," Kelsier said. "I know you're barely able to get the kandra out into the wider cosmere; it's untenable for large-scale travel. Besides, crossing it anymore is like walking into the hands of various gods who absolutely want us dead. There's got to be a better way."

"What are you proposing?" Sazed asked.

"Lead us into a new technological age," Kelsier said. "Help us find ways to defend ourselves, and perhaps accomplish even more. Autonomy consistently shares with her people the things they can accomplish with electricity and industry. You don't."

"People should discover it on their own," Sazed said. "If they do not, there are subtle consequences. We should let the decades play out, becoming centuries, and let humankind find their own path to the cosmere—"

"No," Kelsier said. "We can't wait centuries; we can barely wait decades. If you don't do something, we *will* discover technology on our own—when enemy armies bearing it arrive to destroy us. Lead us to a revolution, Saze. Bring us into a new world."

“The one we’ve arrived at isn’t progressing quickly enough?”

“What do *you* think?” Kelsier asked. “Another few weeks, and they’d have had that rocket working, wouldn’t they? They’d have delivered it straight into the heart of Elendel, and millions would have been vaporized—and we’d have never known it was possible. Well, none of us but you.”

Sazed looked down. “I will … consider.”

“Consider?” Kelsier said. “This is all going to get worse, unless we can stand against the outsiders. Yes, their army withdrew from Shadesmar—you’re welcome for my people’s help with that, by the way—but only because Autonomy is regrouping.

“They’re going to come back, and we need to be ready. With technology. More, with our most powerful resource. We *need* Allomancers and Feruchemists. Is there a way to expand our access to Metalborn? They have the seed inside them, don’t they? The heart of Preservation?”

“I don’t know,” Sazed whispered.

“Are you lying?”

“Have I ever lied to you, old friend?” Sazed opened his eyes and met his gaze, showing infinity within those depths.

“I,” Kelsier said, “am going to protect our people. Whatever it costs. Please tell me I won’t ever have to protect them from you.”

“That depends,” Sazed said, “entirely upon you, old friend.”

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RANETTE

SIX MONTHS AFTER DETONATION

Ranette's honeymoon had been dreadful. Full of *relaxing* and *reading books* and *seeing sights* in Malwish. Not a single gun. She'd barely been allowed to draw schematics and designs.

"You'd better appreciate this," she grumbled to Jaxy as the car pulled up to their place in Elendel.

"You liked it," Jaxy said, poking her in the side. "Don't pretend you didn't like it."

"Having fun gets boring too quickly," Ranette muttered.

"Just think how refreshed you are," Jaxy replied. "How many ideas flowed when you didn't have to worry about deadlines or delivery dates!"

"I like deadlines," Ranette said.

Jaxy eyed her.

"Fine," Ranette said. "It wasn't *awful*. It was *almost* enjoyable. Even if that place is weird. I wish Wax hadn't discovered it. Then maybe we'd have gone to the Roughs."

"The Roughs," Jaxy said. "For our *honeymoon*."

Ranette shrugged. "You're the one who likes that dumb restaurant."

Jaxy rolled her eyes as the car—strangely—didn't stop at their place. It kept driving.

"Wait," Ranette said, turning and looking back.

"There's something you need to see," Jaxy said.

“This isn’t more ‘fun,’ is it? I’m so full of it by this point, I feel like barfing it all right back out.”

“You are *so* romantic,” Jaxy said, taking her arm.

Ranette huffed. Well, she’d been careful not to spoil the actual honeymoon with this kind of behavior. She’d been *nice* and *enjoyable* and *perky.*

Okay. Not perky. But *not grouchy.* Most of the time. And admittedly, the Southern Continent *had* been something special. Even if tensions were … well, growing tenser. There was constant talk of closing the borders to Northerners. It seemed that tourism was at an end.

Regardless, they were home now. This was *supposed* to be her time to gripe. That was how a relationship worked. Push and Pull. She’d given. Now she could take a little. Now she could …

“What the *hell*?” she asked as the car came to a stop outside her shop. A little place on a small plot of land—which had been expanded somehow to a *very large* place on a small plot of land.

“A wedding gift,” Jaxy said.

“How in the world did you afford this?” Ranette said, throwing the door open and stumbling out.

“I didn’t. It’s not from me.”

Ranette looked back.

“Some nice men showed up,” Jaxy explained, “with a sum from Wayne. After … you know. They said I was supposed to do something nice for you, but—the instructions said clearly—‘Not in a skeevy way.’ He suggested a renovation to the shop.”

Ranette couldn’t help smiling at that. She had been surprised by how much she’d missed Wayne. Once he had learned—shockingly, people *could* learn—how to not be slime, they’d actually become friends.

Of course, he’d gone out in the most incredible explosion ever. So she hadn’t felt *that* bad. If you had to die, then hell, that was the way.

She was still trying to figure out how to get her hands on some of those explosives. The things she could build with something that packed that much of a punch …

“He left a note,” Jaxy said, handing it to her.

Hey, it said. In crayon. *These two fellows in suits told me I gotta write this and make decisions about this stuff, just in case. Apparently they think my job is “high risk.” I told them that if they wanted* their *jobs to become high risk, they should try pushin’ me harder to do stupid stuff.*

But … I guess, if you’re readin’ this, I’m done and gone. Buried. Maybe burned. Maybe I got eaten. I dunno. Whatever happened, I hope it’s Marasi’s fault, because she’s always tellin’ me I’m gonna get her *into trouble and it would be nice if that hat were on her head instead.*

Anyway … I want to say thanks. For not throwin’ the Wayne out with the Wayne, ya know? Enjoy the gift. Build something real awesome.

“Damn,” she said, putting her hands on her hips. “I really do miss that little miscreant.”

Jaxy smiled, leaning into her, holding to her arm. “Ranette. That was almost *kind.*”

“I mean it. I miss him.” She smiled. “Wasn’t ever a person I’ve known who was more fun to shoot.”

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MELAAN

NINETEEN MONTHS AFTER DETONATION

The messenger flitted off across the dark ocean of Shadesmar, glowing faintly.

MeLaan sat in a boat kept afloat by some kind of glowing substance on the hull. The blackness beneath was like a liquid, more viscous than water. It was supposed to be perfectly transparent—if a person slipped into it and sank, you were said to be able to watch them fall, and fall, and fall.

“Do you know,” MeLaan said, “what those messengers even *are*?”

“An Invested entity,” her guide said, “which can read Connection to find anyone, anywhere.”

“That’s … kind of unnerving.”

Her guide—Jan Ven—shrugged. She was a creature with four arms, chalk-white skin, and large almost reptilian eyes. Her white hair was wide, like blades of grass. Sho Del were apparently rare out here, but made excellent guides. Something about having a direct line to their gods.

The envelope was stamped with the words SILVERLIGHT MERCANTILE. Inside she found a note from Harmony. Short, to the point, empathetic. Wayne had stopped the attack on the city. And had died in the process.

Her breath caught. She found herself trembling.

Rusts. She was supposed to be better than this. Immortal. Stoic. Why couldn’t she be like the others?

She’d known she wouldn’t see him again. But this? She’d wanted him to find someone else. For his own good. And if she was being honest, for her own good. Because he made her forget what she was. Because with him the world was too interesting, and that made her forget what was smart.

Dead? He …

It was supposed to have been a mere fling. She was just too damn awful at being immortal. She folded the letter, then placed it carefully into her jacket.

“Bad news?” Jan Ven asked, paddling them softly across the infinite black expanse.

“Yes,” MeLaan whispered.

“Do you want to put off the landing?”

MeLaan turned. There was *land* ahead. And lights that seemed too alive for the cold fire of this strange place. People crowded around, hundreds of them, with strange outfits, many with odd red hair. Lost.

This was her task. To save those people.

“No,” MeLaan said, standing. “I have a duty here.”

After all, she could remake, rebuild, and regenerate her heart. That was what her kind did.

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WAXILLIUM

TWO YEARS AFTER DETONATION

The most difficult thing about commissioning Wayne’s statue had been deciding which hat it should be wearing. In the end, the answer had been obvious. They had to make it changeable.

So it was that Wax and Steris stood before a remarkably accurate bronze depiction of Wayne wearing a removable bronze version of his lucky hat. He was larger than life-size, smiling slyly, with an outstretched hand. Likely so that he could pick your pocket with the other, but most people would think he was offering help.

They figured they’d replace the hat once a year. Keep things fresh, interesting. It wasn’t the official unveiling yet, but the artist had let Wax and Steris come to see it. Fences kept others away as they promenaded along the Field of Rebirth at the very hub of Elendel. The knoll where people had first emerged after the remaking of the world.

The statues of the Ascendant Warrior and the Last Emperor were just far enough away that if Wayne’s had been alive, he could have hit them on the backs of their heads with an occasional thrown pebble. That seemed appropriate.

Steris knelt down to read the inscription.

“‘You’re meant to be helping people,’” she read, then noticed a second, smaller inscription plaque at the bottom, near the base. Wax winced as she read this one too.

"'Ain't no fellow who regretted giving it one extra shake,'" she read, "'but you can bet every guy has regretted giving one too few.' I can't believe you used that quote."

"The lower plaque can be removed," Wax said quickly. "We'll change it up now and then too. But … well, that quote *was* something he explicitly asked for."

She stood up and shook her head, but he could tell she was already thinking this would be a good place to put some of the more choice quotes she'd recorded.

Wax remained standing, looking up at the visage of his friend. The dull ache remained. Always would. But Wax had been living his life. He, Steris, and the kids were preparing for another tour of the Roughs. A political tour, to drum up support for their bid to become a province in the changing face of the Basin.

Two years of hard work had staved off civil war. Real progress had finally led to a national assembly for the cities of the Basin. The Roughs were next. Some there wanted to be their own country; he hoped to persuade them they'd be better united.

The gate to the fence slammed, and shortly Marasi stepped up to the statue, wearing Wayne's actual lucky hat. Wayne had left it to her. A last-minute addition to the will, they'd been told. At first, Wax had thought *he* hadn't been left anything specific. Then certain items had started … showing up.

He held up the latest one for Marasi to see.

"A desiccated frog?" Marasi asked.

"Taxidermied," Wax said. "Was in my coat pocket this morning. Along with a note apologizing. Apparently the instructions had been for a *live* frog, but they hadn't quite been able to bring themselves to do it."

"You ever find out who he paid to do this?" Marasi asked, taking the frog by one leg.

"I assume it's the men who handle his estate," Wax said, "from how polite and apologetic the notes are. I haven't had the heart to confront them about it."

"You should just let it keep happening," Steris said.

He frowned as she stepped up to him. “You don’t think it’s gross? Last time was half a sandwich.”

“It is obviously gross,” she said. “But … well, it shows remarkable planning on Wayne’s part. It’s the sort of thing we should encourage.”

“He’s dead,” Marasi pointed out.

“It’s the sort of thing we should respect, then,” Steris said.

Marasi eyed the frog. “They say that in gift-giving, it’s the thought that counts. So … um … how do we interpret this?”

Wax sighed. “I’m sure they’ll run out of items on his list soon enough.”

Both women stared at him.

“Did you *know* Wayne?” Marasi asked. “When in his life did he *ever* let a joke die?”

It was … a fair point. And from what they’d learned about Wayne’s remarkable finances, he’d had the money to keep this joke going for a long, long time. And, well, things like the frog were aggravating. And endearing. Both at once.

Just like Wayne had been.

“Are you ready for your trip, Marasi?” Steris asked.

Marasi grimaced. “Physically? Yes. We’re packed. But mentally? Emotionally?”

“You’ll do wonderfully,” Steris said. “You’re going to be the best rusting ambassador the damn Basin ever had!”

Marasi cocked her head.

“Using respectful language,” Steris explained, looking up at the statue of Wayne, “considering the location.”

“She’s right,” Wax said to Marasi. “You’re exactly what we need. A Basin woman with a Malwish partner. A distinguished public servant with a record for being fair but tough. The leaders of the Southern nations will listen to you.”

Marasi nodded, her expression firm.

“Have to be honest,” Wax said, broaching the topic, “I’m a little surprised to see you leaving the constabulary behind. A part of me thought you’d never walk away. It was your dream.”

“No,” she said. “My dream was to do more. Always has been.”

“I suppose you can do that as ambassador,” Wax said.

Marasi smiled, arms folded. He was happy to see how confident she’d been lately.

“You’re planning something,” Wax said, finding himself amused. “What is it, Marasi?”

“I realized a while ago that there was something I wanted to do, something I wanted to accomplish,” Marasi said. “But I needed experience I didn’t have yet. I think becoming ambassador will help.”

Wax frowned at that, trying to pick out what she meant. But before he could press further, Steris spoke.

“Hopefully you can calm the tensions,” she said. “If anyone can get them to start opening up trade with us again, it will be you.”

He agreed with the sentiment. Wax hadn’t been in the meeting where the Bands had been brought out and found drained, but it smelled of a setup to him. Unfortunately, since the events of the detonation, relations had grown increasingly tense. The Basin felt the Bands had been taken unjustly, and the Malwish claimed that the Basin had shown aggression by even considering using them.

But the Bands were merely a symbol. Part of a larger power play. A new faction in Malwish—the one in control of their unification—kept talking about how Northern disasters had caused them so much hardship over the centuries, and warned that the discovery of these bombs was only the next step. They saw the North as chaotic, unpredictable.

Listening to this group, the Malwish Consortium had forbidden things like tourism and even most forms of trade between continents. Most importantly, they’d forbidden any transfer of harmonium to Northern interests.

No harmonium meant no airships. And no Investiture bombs, though trellium was the rarer component of that particular device. Unfortunately, the Basin had enough of both metals squirreled away to be dangerous. And despite his arguments against it, the Basin had been looking into developing weapons using those remnants.

They’d entered a new age. War was one of the main disasters Steris had to spend her time preparing for. It wouldn’t come to that. Hopefully. If only he could figure out who had drained the Bands …

Don't go down that path, he thought.

Yet if he didn't ask those kinds of questions, who was he? Lawman? Father? Senator?

Questions were part of who he was. He just wished he knew for certain that the choice was his. Though, as he considered—his old instincts working on his behalf—he thought maybe he could piece together what Marasi was planning. Judging by the way she was glancing back at the line of political picket signs in the grass nearby. By the way she'd strategically chosen such a high-profile appointment.

She said she needed experience. Negotiating, perhaps. Soothing egos. Trying to get people to get along …

"Rusts," he said, pointing at her. "You're planning to run for governor."

She jumped at the exclamation. Then blushed. *Then* she raised her chin and nodded.

Wax looked to Steris, who was smiling. "You knew?"

"She needed help planning," Steris said. "But the secret wasn't mine to share."

"I had to really decide," Marasi said. "Had to know for myself, Wax. I need experience. I need to see if I'm any *good* at this sort of work. But … yes."

Huh.

"I found I couldn't content myself with a constable's job," she said, "after what I'd seen and learned. I needed to be able to change things. *Actually* change things." She glanced at him. "Do you think I'm foolish? For years, in my youth, I thought maybe I was being trained to enter politics. I ran away from that, but now…"

They locked eyes. And she seemed to realize, for the first time, what she was saying. Who she was saying it to. Yes, he understood that feeling. He nodded to her, then glanced again at the quote on Wayne's plaque. Those words he'd said, years ago now. *You're meant to be helping people.*

Another figure approached, this one wearing a long black coat and hat. He stepped up beside them, inspecting the statue through spiked eyes.

"It looks good," Death said.

“How is it,” Steris said, “you walk around without drawing attention?”

“Emotional Allomancy,” he said absently.

“You seem better,” Marasi said. “The treatment is working.”

“Thank you,” he replied. “I prefer not to taste of my own offerings. It seems I won’t have to for some time.” He turned to Wax. “Greetings, Brother.”

Wax felt at his abdomen, where he bore his spike. Though he’d been assured being called “brother” by the likes of the kandra and Death didn’t mean he was immortal, it did make him uncomfortable. He’d joined the ranks of an extremely disturbing group. The spiked.

“I’ve considered removing it,” Wax said.

“I will help if you wish,” Death said. “But not all of them can be removed. I nearly lost one once that would have ended me. Still find it amazing that I survived.”

“Perhaps it’s in the blood,” Steris said.

“Perhaps it is at that.” He hesitated. “Harmony wants me to express his regards.”

God could have spoken into Wax’s head because of the spike. But he had—by Wax’s request—vowed never to do so, unless asked. He said he wouldn’t even watch.

The spike, though, continued to perpetuate a problem. Who was Wax? Father, lawman, senator? Or was he none of the three? A part of him still worried, after all these years, that he was something else entirely. A pawn.

“Ironeyes?” Marasi asked. “Is … is Wayne *really* gone? Like … are we absolutely certain?”

Death smiled. “I didn’t meet his soul, Marasi. I only do that some of the time, when Saze Invests me with the power. I think he likes the idea of me living up to the stories people decided to tell about me. It’s … his way.

“Regardless, I didn’t meet Wayne as he left. Harmony did that personally. Yes, your friend is gone.” He nodded to the statue. “Remarkable likeness … It took an intervention to get Vin’s right. But this is spot- on from the first try.”

He nodded to the group of them, then handed a small note to Wax. From there, Death withdrew. Wax didn’t buy his explanation of using emotional

Allomancy to remain hidden. There was something more here.

He turned over the card that Death had given him. It was from Harmony.

> *I've heard distressing things, Waxillium Ladrian, that you've been worrying about. I would like to promise you something. With all the essence and axi of my being, I declare this.*
>
> *No one else moves you.*
>
> *Your life is yours.*
>
> *And you have my deepest apologies that I had a hand in teaching you otherwise.*

Wax held that card for a long time. Then he tucked it into his pocket. He took Steris's hand and looked up at the statue.

Who was he? He supposed … well, he was whoever he wanted to be. No decision had ever forced him to choose one role over others—and being one man did not prevent him from being the others as well. He kept making that mistake, but he vowed right then to stop. To listen to his wife, to his heart, and to Harmony himself.

Father, lawman, senator. He could be all three, and more.

So long as he was helping people.

THE END OF ERA TWO OF MISTBORN

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ARS ARCANUM

METALS QUICK REFERENCE CHART

METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER	HEMALURGY
Iron	Pulls on Nearby Metal	Stores Physical Weight	Steals Strength
Steel	Pushes on Nearby Metal	Stores Physical Speed	Steals Physical Allomancy
Tin	Increases Senses	Stores Senses	Steals Senses
Pewter	Increases Physical Abilities	Stores Physical Strength	Steals Physical Feruchemy
Zinc	Riots Emotions	Stores Mental Speed	Steals Emotional Fortitude
Brass	Soothes Emotions	Stores Warmth	Steals Cognitive Feruchemy
Copper	Hides Allomantic Pulses	Stores Memories	Steals Mental Fortitude
Bronze	Reveals Allomantic Pulses	Stores Wakefulness	Steals Mental Allomancy
Cadmium	Slows Down Time	Stores Breath	Steals Temporal Allomancy
Bendalloy	Speeds Up Time	Stores Energy	Steals Spiritual Feruchemy
Gold	See Your Own Past	Stores Health	Steals Hybrid Feruchemy
Electrum	See Your Own Future	Stores Determination	Steals Enhancement Allomancy
Chromium	Destroys Target’s Allomantic Reserves	Stores Fortune	Might Steal Destiny
Nicrosil	Enhances Target’s Next Metal Burned	Stores Investiture	Steals Investiture
Aluminum	Destroys Your Allomantic Reserves	Stores Identity	Removes All Powers
Duralumin	Enhances the Next Metal Burned	Stores Connection	Steals Connection & Identity

GOD METALS

METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER	HEMALURGY
Atium	See Other People’s Futures	Stores Youth	Steals Any Power

METAL	ALLOMANTIC POWER	FERUCHEMICAL POWER	HEMALURGY
Lerasium	Bestows All Allomantic Abilities	Unknown	Steals All Abilities
Harmonium	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Trellium	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

External metals have been *italicized*. Pushing metals have been **bolded**.

ALLOMANCY ALPHABETICAL REFERENCE

ALUMINUM: A Mistborn who burns aluminum instantly metabolizes all of their metals without giving any other effect, wiping all Allomantic reserves. Mistings who can burn aluminum are called Aluminum Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Trueself Ferrings can store their Spiritual sense of Identity in an aluminum metalmind. This is an art rarely spoken of outside of Terris communities, and even among them it is not yet well understood. Aluminum and a few of its alloys are Allomantically inert; they cannot be Pushed or Pulled and can be used to shield an individual from emotional Allomancy.

BENDALLOY: Slider Mistings burn bendalloy to compress time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more quickly within the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at a glacial pace from the point of view of the Slider. Subsumer Ferrings can store nutrition and calories in a bendalloy metalmind; they can eat large amounts of food during active storage without feeling full or gaining weight, and then can go without the need to eat while tapping the metalmind. A separate bendalloy metalmind can be used to similarly regulate fluid intake.

BRASS: Soother Mistings burn brass to Soothe (dampen) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or across a general area, and the Soother can focus on specific emotions. Firesoul Ferrings can store warmth in a brass metalmind, cooling themselves off while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to warm themselves.

BRONZE: Seeker Mistings burn bronze to “hear” pulses given off by other Allomancers who are burning metals. Different metals produce different pulses. Sentry Ferrings can store wakefulness in a bronze metalmind, making themselves drowsy while actively storing. They can tap the metalmind at a later time to reduce drowsiness or to heighten their awareness.

CADMIUM: Pulser Mistings burn cadmium to stretch time in a bubble around themselves, making it pass more slowly inside the bubble. This causes events outside the bubble to move at blurring speed from the point of view of the Pulser. Gasper Ferrings can store breath inside a cadmium metalmind; during active storage they must hyperventilate in order for their bodies to get enough air. The breath can be retrieved at a later time, eliminating or reducing the need to breathe using the lungs while tapping the metalmind. They can also highly oxygenate their blood.

CHROMIUM: Leecher Mistings who burn chromium while touching another Allomancer will wipe that Allomancer's metal reserves. Spinner Ferrings can store Fortune in a chromium metalmind, making themselves unlucky during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to increase their luck.

COPPER: Coppercloud Mistings (a.k.a. Smokers) burn copper to create an invisible cloud around themselves, which hides nearby Allomancers from being detected by a Seeker and which shields the Smoker from the effects of emotional Allomancy. Archivist Ferrings can store memories in a copper metalmind (coppermind); the memory is gone from their head while in storage, and can be retrieved with perfect recall at a later time.

DURALUMIN: A Mistborn who burns duralumin instantly burns away any other metals being burned at the time, releasing an enormous burst of those metals' power. Mistings who can burn duralumin are called Duralumin Gnats due to the ineffectiveness of this ability by itself. Connector Ferrings can store Spiritual Connection in a duralumin metalmind, reducing other people's awareness and friendship with them during active storage, and can tap it at a later time in order to speedily form trust relationships with others.

ELECTRUM: Oracle Mistings burn electrum to see a vision of possible paths their future could take. This is usually limited to a few seconds. Pinnacle Ferrings can store determination in an electrum metalmind, entering a depressed state during active storage, and can tap it at a later time to enter a manic phase.

GOLD: Augur Mistings burn gold to see a vision of a past self or how they would have turned out having made different choices in the past. Bloodmaker Ferrings can store health in a gold metalmind, reducing their health while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time in order to heal quickly or to heal beyond the body's usual abilities.

IRON: Lurcher Mistings who burn iron can Pull on nearby sources of metal. Pulls must be directly toward the Lurcher's center of gravity. Skimmer Ferrings can store physical weight in an iron metalmind, reducing their effective weight while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their effective weight.

NICROSIL: Nicroburst Mistings who burn nicrosil while touching another Allomancer will instantly burn away any metals being burned by that Allomancer, releasing an enormous (and perhaps unexpected) burst of those metals' power within that Allomancer. Soulbearer Ferrings can store Investiture in a nicrosil metalmind. This is a power that very few know anything about; indeed, I'm certain the people of Terris don't truly know what they are doing when they use these powers.

PEWTER: Pewterarm Mistings (a.k.a. Thugs) burn pewter to increase their physical strength, speed, and durability, also enhancing their bodies' ability to heal. Brute Ferrings can store physical strength in a pewter metalmind, reducing their strength while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their strength.

STEEL: Coinshot Mistings who burn steel can Push on nearby sources of metal. Pushes must be directly away from the Coinshot's center of gravity. Steelrunner Ferrings can store physical speed in a steel metalmind, slowing them while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to increase their speed.

TIN: Tineye Mistings who burn tin increase the acuity of their five senses. All are increased at the same time. Windwhisperer Ferrings can store the acuity of one of the five senses into a tin metalmind; a different tin metalmind must be used for each sense. While storing, their acuity in that sense is reduced, and when the metalmind is tapped that sense is enhanced.

ZINC: Rioter Mistings burn zinc to Riot (enflame) the emotions of nearby individuals. This can be directed at a single individual or across a general area, and the Rioter can focus on specific emotions. Sparker Ferrings can store mental speed in a zinc metalmind, dulling their ability to think and reason while actively storing, and can tap it at a later time to think and reason more quickly.

ON THE THREE METALLIC ARTS

On Scadrial, there are three prime manifestations of Investiture. Locally, these are spoken of as the “Metallic Arts,” though there are other names for them.

Allomancy is the most common of the three. It is end-positive, according to my terminology—meaning that the practitioner draws in power from an external source. The body then filters it into various forms. (The actual outlet of the power is not chosen by the practitioner, but instead is hardwritten into their spiritweb.) The key to drawing this power comes in the form of various types of metals, with specific compositions being required. Though the metal is consumed in the process, the power itself doesn’t actually come from the metal. The metal is a catalyst, you might say, that begins an Investiture and keeps it running.

In truth, this isn’t much different from the form-based Investitures one finds on Sel, where specific shape is the key—here, however, the interactions are more limited. Still, one cannot deny the raw power of Allomancy. It is instinctive and intuitive for the practitioner, as opposed to requiring a great deal of study and exactness, as one finds in the form-based Investitures of Sel.

Allomancy is brutal, raw, and powerful. There are sixteen base metals that work, though two others—named the “God Metals” locally—can be used in alloy to craft an entirely different set of sixteen each. As these God Metals are no longer commonly available, the other metals are not in wide use.

Feruchemy is still widely known and used at this point on Scadrial. Indeed, you might say that it is more present today than it has been in many eras past, when it was confined to distant Terris or hidden from sight by the Keepers.

Feruchemy is an end-neutral art, meaning that power is neither gained nor lost. The art also requires metal as a focus, but instead of being consumed, the metal acts as a medium by which abilities within the practitioner are shuttled through time. Invest that metal on one day, withdraw the power on another day. It is a well-rounded art, with some feelers in the Physical, some in the Cognitive, and even some in the Spiritual. The last powers are under heavy experimentation by the Terris community, and aren't spoken of to outsiders.

It should be noted that the interbreeding of the Feruchemists with the general population has diluted the power in some ways. It is now common for people to be born with access to only one of the sixteen Feruchemical abilities. It is hypothesized that if metalminds could be made from alloys with the God Metals, other abilities could be discovered.

Hemalurgy is less widely known in the modern world of Scadrial. Its secrets were kept close by those who survived their world's rebirth, and the only known practitioners of it now are the kandra—who for the most part serve Harmony—a few scattered koloss clans, and the Set.

Hemalurgy is an end-negative art. Some power is lost in the practice of it. Though many through history have maligned it as an "evil" art, none of the Investitures are actually evil. At its core, Hemalurgy deals with removing abilities—or attributes—from one person and bestowing them on another. It is primarily concerned with things of the Spiritual Realm, and is of the greatest interest to me. If one of these three arts is of great importance to the cosmere, it is this one. I think there are numerous possibilities for its use.

COMBINATIONS

It is possible on Scadrial to be born with ability to access both Allomancy and Feruchemy. This has been of specific interest to me lately, as the mixing of different types of Investiture has curious effects. One need look only at what has happened on Roshar to find this manifested—two powers, combined, often have an almost chemical reaction. Instead of getting out exactly what you put in, you get something new.

On Scadrial, someone with one Allomantic power and one Feruchemical power is called “Twinborn.” The effects here are more subtle than they are when mixing Surges on Roshar, but I am convinced that each unique combination also creates something distinctive. Not just two powers, you could say, but two powers … and an effect. This demands further study.

ON SPIKES AND COMPOUNDING

Something odd is happening with the nature of spikes and Hemalurgy on Scadrial, of particular note to any arcanists who study the nature of Intent and Connection. I have, after lengthy questing, obtained an interview with Marsh, the one known as Ironeyes on Scadrial. (As a side note, it is curious how news of his nature is spreading to other worlds. Is this natural rumormongering, or something more supernatural?)

I can confirm, as best as it can be attested, that he is fully capable of Compounding to expand his life. He speaks of things of the past, like Hemalurgic decay and the toll that holding so many spikes takes upon the body. Inquisitors during his day slept for many hours; the Words of Founding say this was due to the need for storing health, but Marsh indicates there may be more subtlety to it than first understood. I’d postulate that it was in part a side effect of the incredible burden placed upon their souls by the nature of their horrific transformations.

Modern souls, however, seem to simply reject spikes of this magnitude. Further research is required, but I believe that this has something to do with the nature of Ruin’s subservience to Preservation in the current dual vessel known as Harmony. The level of corruption of a soul that was possible in ancient days is no longer viable; if too many spikes are added, souls stop gaining powers. Marsh doesn’t think this is a conscious decision on Harmony’s part. Indeed, I think this is beyond the conscious abilities of even a Shard.

Instead, I believe this is the nature of souls (read: the Invested portion of a person’s nature) and their balance with the cosmere. In the ancient days, Ruin was pushing hard on the fabric of Scadrial, leaking into spirit- webs through any method possible. Causing souls to decay faster, to accept more spikes than they should have been able to, and leaving the resulting person burdened beyond what was reasonable.

At any rate, the end result is a limit on the number of spikes a person can hold without external intervention. And, most key, Compounding seems beyond the abilities of any Hemalurgist created in this more modern era. The secret to cracking why this is, and how to circumvent it, could be of utmost importance to those watching Hemalurgy and its (presumed) danger to the cosmere as a whole.

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